SAM LOCK

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not the time of clocks

CADOGAN

Introduction

by Alice Zucca

Time, according to Aristotle, can only be truly defined in reference to the concept of becoming, observing that time is not the changing of things, but the measure of their becoming. Time, consequently, always implies the existence of the soul since every measurement presupposes the existence of a measuring mind; that is, a mind capable of taking into account the nature and sequence of the succession of things. In this sense, deeply involved and participating in the experience of "living", Sam Lock reaches to create a unique mapping of lost and rediscovered moments, of the ephemeral here and now; his works are presences and absences at the same time that mark the tempo and pauses of the course of events, of the world around us. The desire to reconcile the inner world of memory and imagination with the exterior reality that we encounter on a daily basis appears to be the founding principle of Sam Lock's research. We carry these dynamics and encrypted information with us wherever we go in an attempt to decipher the symbols and signifiers of our contemporary experience. Lock's art communicates and maps a silent and universal story and creates, through the variation of sign, movement, and intervention, a real visual alphabet – an eloquent language from silence. His marks almost have a "cinematic" taste, which occurs in a movement that - in the flux - spontaneously transitions from gestural to narrative, from image to thought, through visual stimuli and energies that speak louder than words.

In Sam Lock's research, the very use of painting, materials and the artist's approach to the creative act challenge previous conventions. The image through gesture is abstract - and the artist's gesture, far from being a simple action or the simple recording of facts, actions, geographic and temporal contexts with mere documentary intent, now moves – as the artist says: "in the liminal spaces in-between, finding and losing at the same time, being present and absent, being author and non-author, reasoning and imagining, constructing and deconstructing, finding solace in the shared mystery and anticipation of roads that lead nowhere and everywhere" - in a dualism that returns a totalizing image of outer and inner reality at the same time. Sam Lock's analysis draws inspiration from the works of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, two of the most prominent playwrights of the 20th century. "Under what is said, something else is said," said Pinter, and the ideas implied in this observation, which include concepts of double meanings, loss, discovery, and the overlap of the past and present, are critical to understanding Lock's entire body of work. A "narrative" that, now devoid of diegetic intent, intends to abandon the very foundations of the transmission of a concept only through language (as the word itself is overcharged with meanings), in order to arrive through the "sight" at a "speaking silence" that resonates through a play of presences and absences - which ultimately, simply and poetically, tells and "stages" almost as in theatre, the story of our existence in the world as human beings.

One

mixed media on canvas
194cm x 154cm

Three

mixed media on canvas
135cm x 109cm

Carnation, Lily, Lily Rose

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Obscura I

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Twelve

mixed media on canvas
190cm x 150cm

Souvenir d’Italie

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

The Fair Haired Boy

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

ALICE ZUCCA:

There is a narrative component in your work that relates to a time marked by the very act of living (an event, an experience and so omitting). You said that the creative act for you is not a cathartic moment where you aspire to be better or worse, but rather it is being part of the course of an event. Your marks tell a silent and universal story and create, through the variation of sign, movement and intervention, a real visual alphabet - a language from silence.

The spoken word is an incomplete way of expression - strongly charged and already containing in itself a quantity of instructions, of power and teachings because of its universal meaning, in a way that doesn't truly express the variation of thoughts and intentions it can hold. Therefore thinkers have encouraged us to find meaning and language beyond the word, in silence.

In your work, silence is counterpointed with the written word. If among the fates of silence is the landing of a word that restores its ineffability, there is also a space that marks in the arrivals of silence the presence of an "image" that is capable of being perceived in the interiority of all. The poets are able to show us this contrast. For me you are not only an artist in this sense, you are a poet, you have managed to create a form of visual language that preserves silence.

Could you tell me more about your creative process?

SAM LOCK:

There is a process but it is contradictory and belligerent at times. It seems to me that I am always losing something – other possibilities, more of a process of elimination. There are two stages in my works: the energy and optimism of "now" and committing to adding to the work – marks, surface, direction – physical and immediate; but subsequently the energy changes into memory of "then", deciding to lose marks and parts of the work, disrupting its movements, making it still or stutter. I suppose it is destructive in some way. Sometimes this happens without me doing anything – as in the latest works for this exhibition. The energy of now just fades away into the past, leaving a monument or memory of itself, echoes and silence maybe? The bare canvas is deliberate in these works, it cannot be easily edited once the mark is made, forcing me to leave it alone.

My aim is always to not know – I prefer the tone of uncertainty – it's like an underlying principle for me. The language that you mention and the poetry you allude to is liminal in my practice, it only exists if I don't look at it too head on. I arrive at it rather than use it with dexterity. It isn't accidental in any way though – but rather delicate... maybe fragile in some way? There is an idea here about conscious and subconscious but again I don't think this is authentic for me – this is not a mysterious or mystical creative process – I think I feel it to be more earthed than that – more natural?

AZ:
What does silence represent to you and how does this concept relate to your work?

SL:
Your phrase “preserving silence” is beautiful to me and articulates what I have felt to be happening in the studio. Instead of looking for the work to talk to me, I am waiting for it to stop its chattering and to simply sit in silence with itself. My studio is normally full of lots of different works at different degrees of resolve; all of them talking away to me at once, trying to tell me they are finished or interesting – a cacophony. I move from work to work in an unplanned way; I pick them up, put them down, each time reacting to the signposts they contain, or following the breadcrumbs I have left for myself. There is not a logical line through the works, they sometimes take moments, or months before they learn not to try and talk too much. The works are tricksy though – they are false and desperate, anxious to convince me of their worth – and it is the paintings that just sit silently that I am looking for. My ideal is that I look around the studio and there is a hum of nothing in my ears. These are the works that I want to show people.

The concept of silence itself has become more poignant to me since seeing my dad after he died – a natural utter stillness and the deepest silent silence.

AZ:
How did you arrive at this form of “language”?

SL:
I think this mirrors the development of any language – first words, using them again and again, stringing them together, learning to talk with them, learning to write with them. But for me it is about making yourself misunderstood – it is a “language” but I think it asks rather than tells. It gives you silence or space to move into.

I believe that abstraction has a deep complexity at its centre, like a calm at the centre of a storm. This is a picture of how I arrived at this point – a storm of paintings about colour, space, texture. For me it has been a process of stripping away – anything that is not honest or real has to go – until there is just painting left behind. I have learnt that the less I try to speak, the more the paintings have to say.

Four

mixed media on canvas
135cm x 109cm

Mrs Graham

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Castle

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Seven

mixed media on canvas
194cm x 154cm

A Boy with a Rabbit

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Lisa

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Thirteen

mixed media on canvas
190cm x 150cm

The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Obscura VI

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Eight

mixed media on canvas
194cm x 154cm

AZ:
How does your art become an "invitation" and what do you mean by this according to your point of view?

SL:
I think it is a Magritte quote that states that the "human mind looks for spaces to fill". In this way, ambiguity can act as an invitation to fill the gap, to author meanings, or steer the interpretation of a painting. The best work for me has hooks that hold your attention, slowly unfolding or revealing itself to you. The longer you look, the more you find in the surfaces of my paintings. It is the echoes and traces and absences that I hope keep the viewer in front of the work. My ideal is that after a while, you stop realizing you are looking at a painting and are just in thought or feeling.

AZ:
What concepts and thoughts inspire you to create? What is the message you want to communicate?

SL:
I no longer wait for moments of inspiration. For me it is more that my practice has a current that I am carried by. The studio has a perpetual motion to it and a framework of ideas that are designed to make things happen and always starting journeys. I try to act on ideas as they occur, even if they appear to be cul-de sacs – it feels to me to be always ongoing and never finished.

In terms of a message, it's not my tone of voice. Rather, I have questions that I think are interesting and important to me – making paintings is my way of seeing if other people feel the same. I am, I suppose, trying to find something elusive and human and vulnerable that we have in common. I feel that this exists most beautifully in painting and so spend my time trying to find it; the paintings are what's left behind as I go.

AZ:

One of the focal points in your practice is to reconcile the inner world of memory and imagination with our everyday life in an attempt to decipher the symbols and signifiers of our contemporary experience. I find the idea of a painting becoming an "invitation" (to the interpretation of a universal story through your "traces" etc.) very interesting. "An invitation to interpret historical marks or moments in time. Things that you do pass into history really quickly but then they come to life again in the imagination of others", you said. This is particularly interesting to me, as the power of memory is to reinterpret history while also uniting us through what we perceive as familiar, even more than language. Through the traces of memory, your works collect the references of the relationship between past and contemporary times, questioning the condition and identity of the present. Through the association of materials and decisions, artefacts of thought and doing - combinations and interactions between material and gesture, artist and viewer - you actually activate a "rewriting" of narrative memory, juxtaposing different histories and realities and constantly actualizing the past, now free of all chronological constraints – or what we call the 'time of clocks' - and marked by a universal inner time that unites us as human beings. The act of "manipulating" the canvas leaves traces - recording both the inner process and sensory/experiential memory, but also 'long-term' memory of feelings and ongoing events stretching across generations. It seems to me as if through a mapping of these intuitive and mnemonic stimuli you are trying to leave that trace; your gestures as a technical emanation of your art but that speaks about our combined memories.

Could you tell me more about the concept of memory from your point of view and how these concepts apply to your practice?

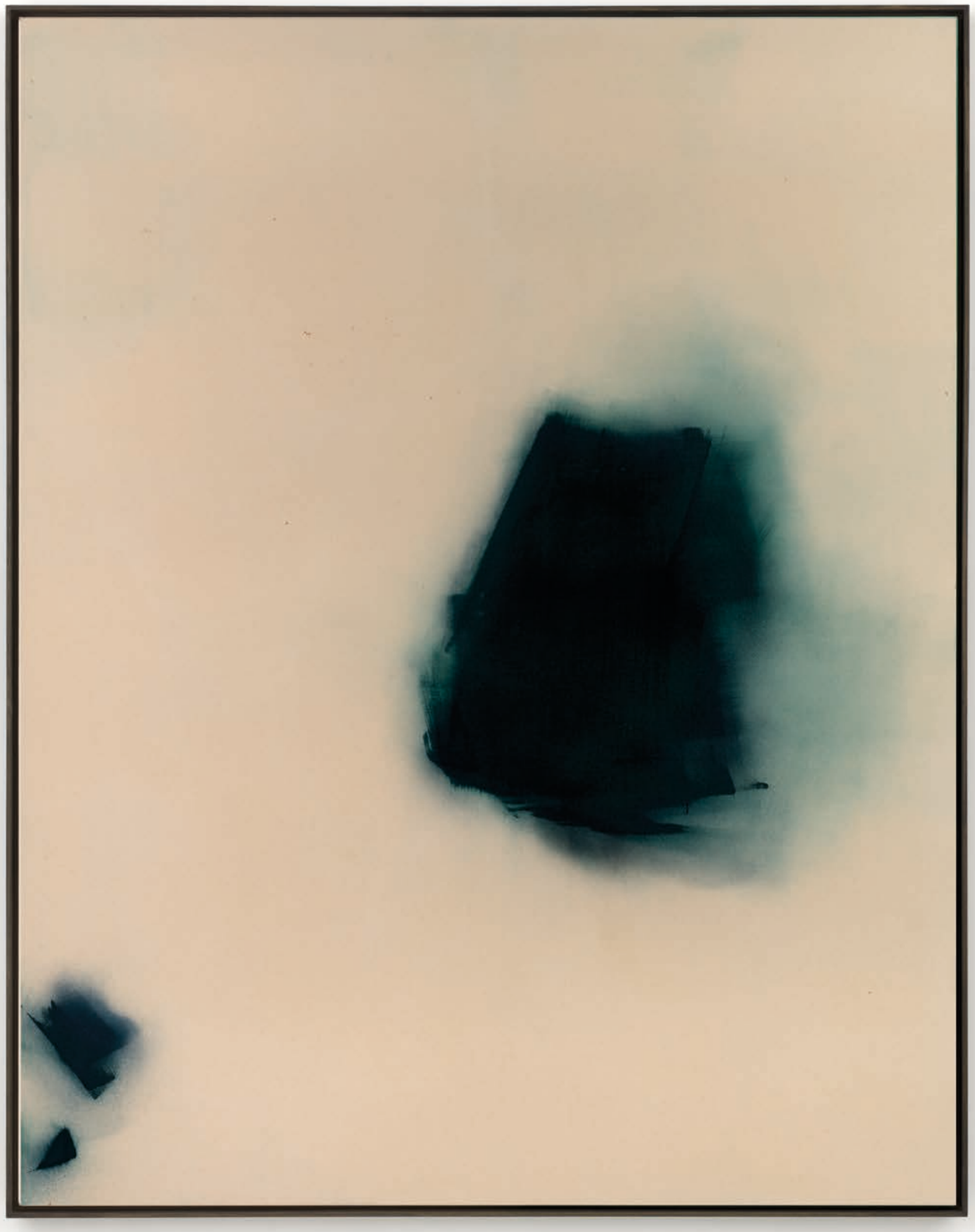
SL:

I believe that is our primary experience – to become containers of memory and to develop our identities alongside this. The narratives that we hold onto become our keystones, attaching us to others and framing us. Making a painting mirrors this experience. There is a Jan Švankmajer idea that I like to think of, that objects remember being used and hold the energy imparted to them as memory. In this context, a painting is not a container of my memories but more so a container of the memory of the gesture or action it is subjected to. I think the reason this is important to me is that it stops a nostalgic narrative emerging – the past is not an idyll for me at all. It is just something that is always growing bigger for all of us, all the time.

Rewriting is key to my practice; change and chance are used to disrupt the narratives of the work so they are not obvious. They are artefacts of time spent by me but I also want them to take time from others, to come to life in unexpected ways through the imagination and memory of others. To absorb the time people take looking at them in some way – an interface in some respects.

Eleven

mixed media on canvas
154cm x 134cm



Fourteen

mixed media on canvas
190cm x 150cm

Five

mixed media on canvas
135cm x 109cm

The Letter

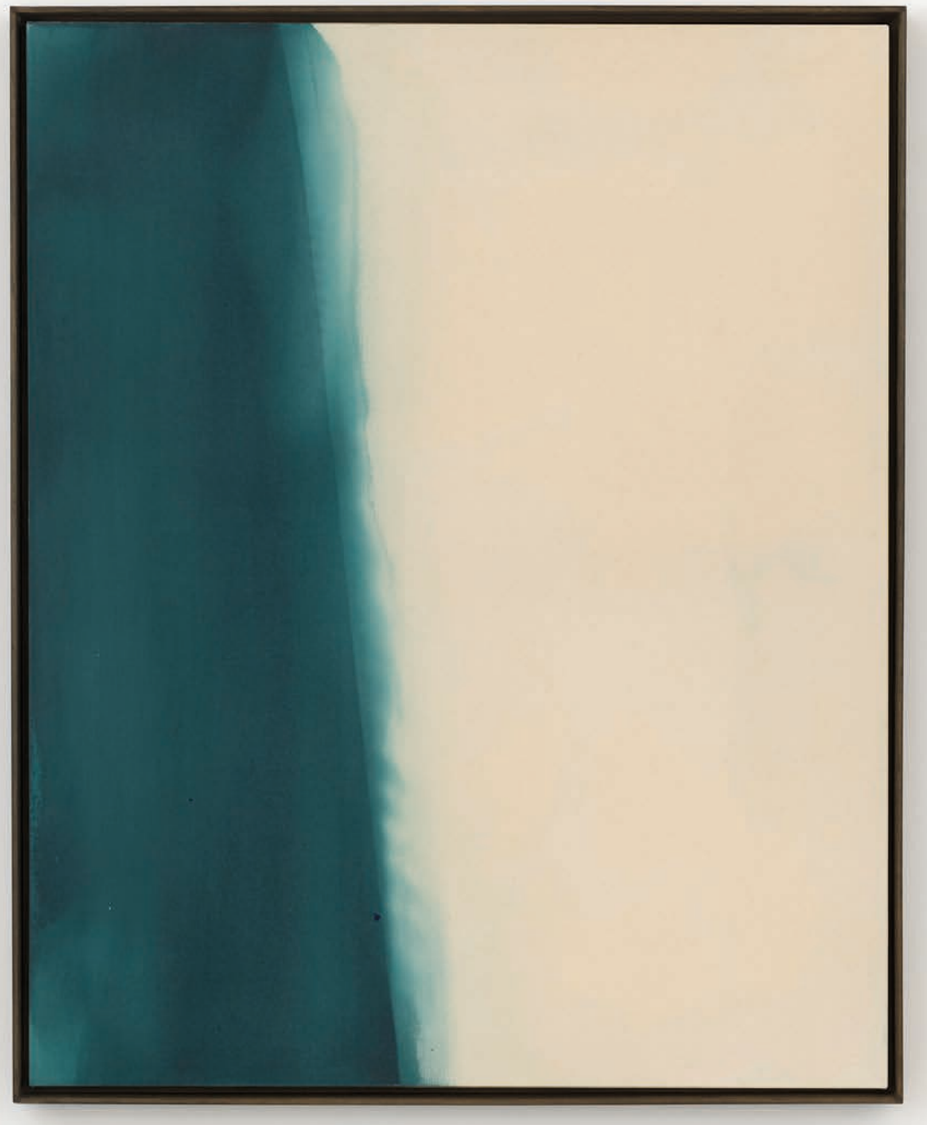
mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Dante and Beatrice

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Two

mixed media on canvas
135cm x 109cm



AZ:
Physicality and gesture are important components in your art and evident in all your works as the result of a repeated process of construction and destruction. The works are imbued with a feeling of elusiveness, revealing layers of past images and tones that move in and out of themselves. This sense of movement and presence/absence, including your literal (physical/gestural) entering and leaving the work, relates in a sense to the movement between memory and reality, the movements of mind and the residue of action, as well as the sense of unpredictability that pervades your works.

To what extent does the element of unpredictability contribute to the creation of your works and in what way according to your point of view?

SL:
Unpredictability breaks everything in interesting ways, and it is part of the way I avoid a cyclical rhythm in the studio. It stops me getting seduced by the world of appearances and points me back to something hidden and more substantial that is underlying. I am not interested in committing to one approach to making paintings or in creating homogeneity in my work – to make the same painting again and again to satisfy a commercial demand is soulless to me. I don't want to be known for a single recognizable style of work – it's not the outward appearance that connects all the things I make, but what is at their heart.

AZ: How important is the gestural act in the creative process?

SL:
The gesture is handwriting and life in action; it commits to now and becomes then. It is the embodiment of time and memory. My work is driven by gestures – they track my moments, my finite and limited moments and so if each moment we have is treasure, then each mark we make is treasure.

AZ:
Can you tell me more about the concept of presence/absence in your work - what do absence and presence represent for you?

SL:
I think this is related to things discussed before – the gesture, memory.

But it is a key concept. The liminal space between these ideas pervades all I do, I think – the presence of absence, the absence of presence. It places the work in an interesting context, where you are not sure whether things are coming together or falling apart. I am interested in how Samuel Beckett uses these ideas: each moment or character or event contains both presence and absence as contradictory and complimentary ideas layered over each other all at once. It is a paradox for existence: are we really here, are we dreaming this? For all we know, there is a huge absence that is at our heart – we do not know the answer to our purpose, our creation, our past or future. It is a metaphor for the metaphysical.

AZ:
Could you tell me more about the concept of "submitting" to the canvas?

SL: This idea of "submitting" is, for me, about handing over impetus, that the driving force comes from within the painting. I never have an idea of how a work will end, only how it starts. I am interested in the nature of my presence in my own work – am I author or facilitator? Am I boss or worker? Am I present or absent? Am I aware or lost? Am I listening or telling? The canvas will tell me the answer to these things all the time like a constant undercurrent, allowing me to interfere and intervene with this narrative until they no longer matter and the painting becomes independent of me and no longer needs me. I think it is this process that defines the endgame for each painting I make.

AZ:
Speaking of time you stated that you see "time not as something to be measured or controlled, but rather as the heartbeat of everything we know - it is what makes and undoes everything, including us - and transforms all things in memory … The energy of change that surrounds us and that exists within us … the current that carries everything."

I see this movement of time in your work as a fundamental active element of "inter-action" which becomes presence and absence at the same time, and it is a "here and now" that has a past, it is a time that is possibly always still in progress. Through your marks and intervention, the rhythm of the events takes shape. Past and future belong to the living present, they are its dimensions, since in the past the previous instants are held in the present by the "contraction", and in the future the subsequent instants of waiting are anticipated in the present by the same contraction. Let's make it simple: speaking of time we take the tick-tock of the clock; in this perspective time joins the tick-tock in a soul that contemplates it, and that contemplating of this fusion of elements constitutes our habit of living, that is, that it forms our expectation that the event continues - that the ticking does not stop suddenly, it is the movement of the journey, the flow - of - living.

If you think about all this, time always passes, it is elusive, we can never really measure or control it - what will have to happen has maybe actually already happened, like some meteors, some stars that we see falling, have already fallen millions of years ago - an action to be taken may have already been accomplished - everything changes and disappears and then appears again in our mind - your approach to time is profound and brilliant.

I am really curious to know more about the concept of time in relation to your practice from your point of view. Your paintings are "containers" of time - could you tell me more about this aspect?

SL:
The Greeks have two definitions for time: Chronos and Kairos, man-made time and divine time. The interplay between these two elements are our tragedy – that we last for a limited amount of time in an infinite space and time that doesn't care for us.

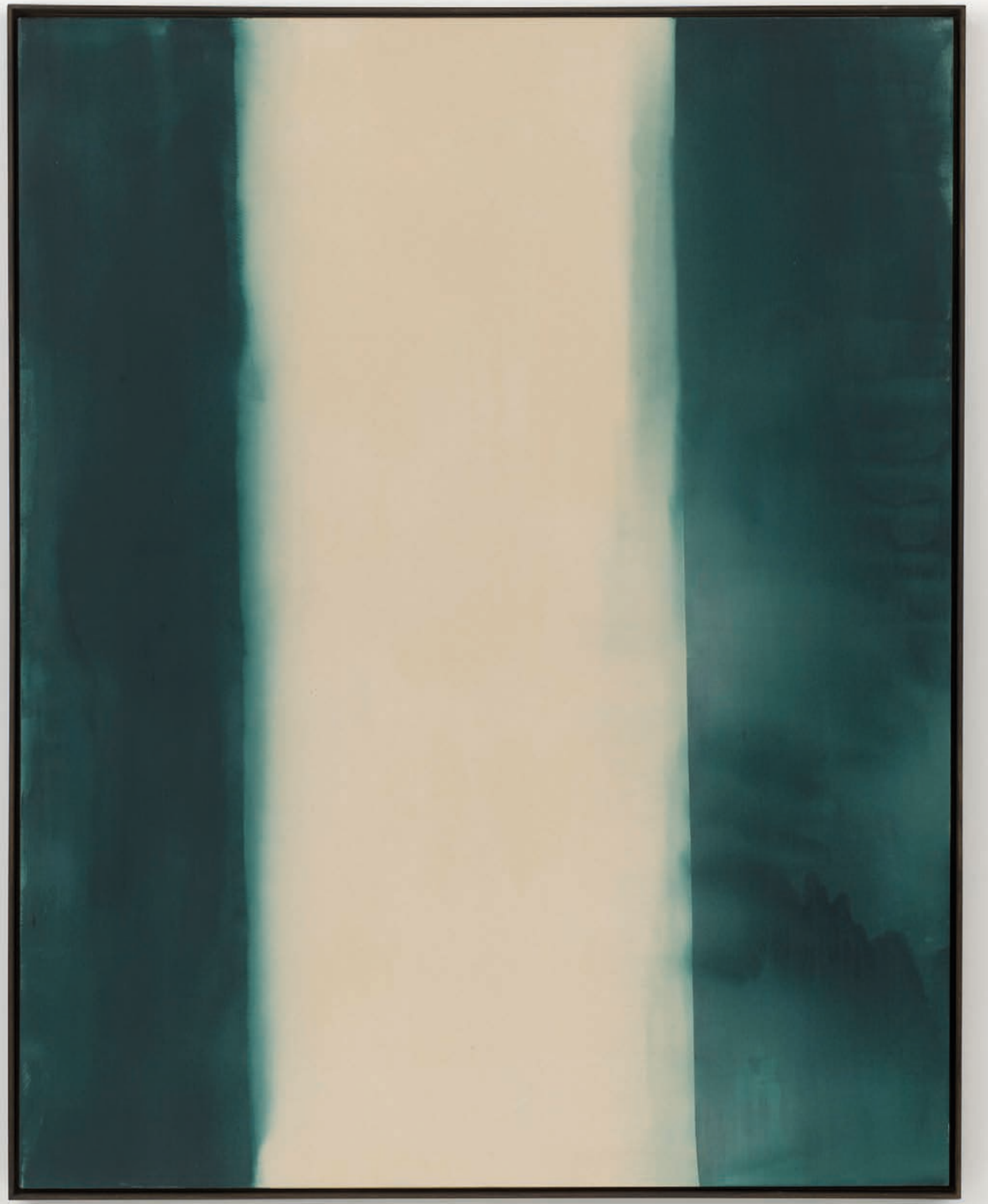
I am intrigued and drawn to the futility of ourselves and also paradoxically the importance we place in ourselves – the centreground we inhabit and the control we pretend to have. I think there is more comfort and reward in being aware of the insignificance – that we are not supposed to be in control of things, that time will always pass. We try and understand the world by breaking it up into manageable pieces, give it edges and impose systems upon it. I think a painting exists here for me like a battleground for ideas: physically it has edges and contains marks and decisions, but it also acts as a fragment of an infinite.

Six

mixed media on canvas
194cm x 154cm

Nine

mixed media on canvas
194cm x 154cm



The Doge

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Broken Pitcher

mixed media on paper
35cm x 27cm

Ten

mixed media on canvas
154cm x 135cm

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