

## Jessica Rankin *'the nostalgia for the infinite'*

17 March – 1 May 2021  
White Cube Bermondsey

We plan to open this exhibition to the public on Tuesday 13 April, subject to UK government guidelines. Advance tickets can be booked [HERE](#).

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Explore an online version of this exhibition [HERE](#).

White Cube is pleased to present an exhibition by Jessica Rankin. Featuring new, mixed media paintings and works on paper, it marks a significant shift within the artist's practice. Known for her large-scale embroideries, collages and watercolours that combine celestial maps and landscapes with text, Rankin's recent works focus more specifically on the language of painting. While her earlier embroideries could be read within a historical tradition of landscape painting, Rankin's new paintings can be situated within the trajectory of abstraction.

This new body of work developed in the aftermath of the 2016 US election. A period of personal struggle for the artist, in these works Rankin focuses on ideas of desire, joy, intimacy and tenderness and how, in an age of political and social turmoil, these states can forge a space for resistance. In particular, Rankin was inspired by the way marginalised sectors of society – including queer people or people of colour as well as women – are able to maintain identities and relationships and forge a place in the world, in the wake of increasing social conservatism.

Intuitive in her approach, Rankin draws on a wide range of subjects and themes, including personal experience, memory, poetry and literature. Responding to John Cage's adage of being 'unfamiliar to yourself', this new body of work emerges from what Rankin has described as 'a place of free-fall'. 'I wanted to not know what I was doing' she has said, at the same time as 'trying to keep myself off balance in the process of making.' She fuses symmetry with asymmetry, creating forms that seem to both double and reduce through free-flowing gestures. With their pools of vivid colour that appear to organically spread across the canvas, the works recall the 'abstract climates' of Helen Frankenthaler. But Rankin's work uses thread as well as paint, thereby opening up the possibilities not only for a link to modernist abstract painting but also the slow, methodological approach of handcraft.

From a distance, paint splashes are indistinguishable from stitches, while close-up, dense areas of stitching contrast with thinly painted stains of colour. This shift between mediums and density evokes a sense of physical energy and movement. Deep blues, rich pinks and bright yellows and oranges are offset by the neutral colour of the raw canvas surface, and rapid, gestural mark-making connects with slow, controlled areas of stitching, combining to create an unexpected rhythm to the overall compositions. In some works, the sides of the canvases are heavily worked with more thread and fragments of text. Inspired by a multitude of voices, including those of Etel Adnan, Emily Dickinson, Cecil Taylor, Paul Celan, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Hélène Cisoux and Clarice Lispector, they behave like spines on a book, revealing emotional and alluring quotes or statements.

Dealing with both the 'ends and beginnings of life and matter', Rankin relies on the dynamic interplay of her materials, where the painted mark meets the sewn line and where the sewn line continues, complicates or interrupts the painted gesture. In *High Thought*

*Tunes, PC* (2020), multiple loose hanging, fringe-like threads create shapes that arc, coil and extend across the picture, echoing and disrupting the thinly painted stains of orange, pink and red beneath. In *Strange Currents, EA* (2020), gestural paint marks invoke a celestial expanse, while areas of densely sewn threads are suggestive of flight paths on a map. Many of her works share an unfolding sense of space, whether the billowing of a restless sky or a rolling landscape, its shapes are blurred and light filtered, as if being travelled through at speed.

A new series of works on paper, completed in the seclusion of rural upstate New York during the 2020 lockdown, combine colourful, exuberant watercolour with delicate areas of stitching. Using a palette evocative of warm summer days and lush, fresh foliage, they radiate energy; of new beginnings and joyful artistic freedom. In some, circular marks from the bottom of a jar are incorporated into the compositions which are built up from washes, drips, splashes and stains. *Eros Once Again* (2020) consists of diamonds or leaf shapes in a range of blues and greens set at an angle, as if blown across the paper's surface. Nestled between them are phrases, words and letters – some indecipherable, others clear – together dissolving in the right-hand section of the composition into another form of language – that of tiny, colourful stitching.

Her combined use of different media serves to complicate clear 'authentic' gesture since, in Rankin's work, thread may occupy the expressive and dynamic role of paint or, equally, paint may render a mark-making common to thread. Working with various scales and speeds, and pushing her pictorial language to its limit by 'choosing gestures, colours, ways of making that are hard to control or uncomfortable', Rankin grapples with the poetic potential of beauty and hardship at a moment when the world is drawn to collapse.

Jessica Rankin was born in 1971 in Sydney, Australia and lives and works in New York. Selected solo and duo exhibitions include Touchstones Rochdale, UK (2017); Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2016) with Julie Mehretu; Salon 94, New York (2014); Savannah College of Art and Design, Atlanta (2013); The Project, New York (2009); MoMA PS1, New York (2006); and Franklin Artworks, Minneapolis (2005). Group exhibitions include The Uptown Triennial, New York (2017); Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK (2015); Fie Myles, New York (2011); Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco (2011); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2006); The Project, Los Angeles (2005); and Artist's Space, New York (2003).