



Helen Marten

1 Davies Street W1
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The exhibition's own folly is classical: the attempt to depict a horse. This exertion unfolds in three ways: a monumental photographic wallpaper, an architectural scaffold, a fictional tale. In each instance, a reckless inaccessibility deliberately foils any practical realisation of the subject at hand. The horse is not realised in language, not realised in form, not realised in image. Instead, the threat of linear time is suspended, confused, or even violated, because the idea "horse", almost arbitrary, is resistant to conventional capture and closure.

On large wallpaper, a photographic image of a white horse stands occupying what looks to be the Davies Street gallery. The image is upside down, the horse hanging static and luminous. The horse is a real horse, documented inside the gallery space several months prior but the image-space it stands in is a mutant, a new construction of CGI treachery, skewed and altered to produce the perspectival artifice of an additional spatial dimension. Looking from outside through the gallery's large glass window, the inverted planes where the walls and floors meet produce the effect of a new elongation, artificially suggesting the illusion of a much wider additional room. There is no obvious functional appropriateness to this gesture, other than reinforcing the condition of distrust in an image's initially yielded message. The horse itself is a problem of gesture and analogy, surrounded by motifs of soundless instability: a planet Earth balloon; soap bubbles; dust and fauna debris. Imagining the horse as both contemporary cipher and ancient mythological signifier, there are no surprises then that the etymological root of image is linked to imitation: imaginative meaning accumulates.

Twenty-six paintings of identical scale are hung in an equally spaced circuit around the periphery of the gallery. A glib bronze temperature gauge in the form of a frog with downturned mouth and raised umbrella is repeated in sequence across each of the paintings. Each depicts a replicated view through a window onto a classic Romantic landscape. The scene is torturous in its repetitive similarity. Each painting has been made using snapshots captured from a real 3-dimensional model moving in multiplane fashion through the constructed landscape. These fictional renderings of signs – trees, fences, clouds, cliffs – become more than the simple possibility of existence of the great labour force of nature continually producing objects of human and social utility, but part of the trompe l'oeil effect of privileging mobility over stasis.

These paintings also house a single "page" fragment of a fictional story written by the artist. Each paragraph begins with the next consecutive letter of the alphabet, an A-Z circuit whose narrative tells of the generative friendship of two strangers and their horse. The typography is punctured with falling leaves, 26 scattered over the beginning A, 0 at the concluding Z, meaning that a full seasonal cycle has flushed and then ended with the narrative closure of the story, the alphabet exhausted.

Built from red oxide steel and sewn fabric sacks, the largest horse evocation is the most aesthetically economical. Clad in beige and cream, the sculptural logic is similar to that of a tent, harnessing with its slender minimalism an emotional abruptness. Straight tendons are held in place alongside taut fabric, sometimes pockets, sometimes cables. The horse form they seek to diagram belongs to the rudimentary space of early computer rendering – the straight line before the eloquence of a curve seemed possible. A tent is an ensemble of parts, elements in a tensile mix that rely on one another for stability. And this wildly oversized horse, like foliage, like pillar or vault or any other arborescent example of architecture, is tethered downwards by the directional core of its feet, from which numerous possible lines and faces spring: the tail is long; the long tale continues.

There are 26 paintings with cast bronze; 1 immersive architectural structure; 1 floor-based sculpture and 1 wallpaper.

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Days are treacherous. This is our paradox: we model and the world performs with glittering appeal until dramatic composition wears thin. To look upon a shoebox diorama with aerial distance is to play witness to all the analogue approximations of life as dramaturgy, and modelling of course is historic. The Romans built model cities with their belief in imperial organisation. The Greeks harnessed beasts and made empire-building sport, they engineered grottos and laid decorative fancies for their goddesses. There was the Renaissance and its Platonic metaphysics.

Virgil's warning '*do not trust the Horse, Trojans. Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts*' reinterprets a divine offering into a device insinuated to bring downfall. It is a coalescence around the distrust of an image that is ultimately constituted by material means neither rigid nor ephemeral but strangely multiple. Troy's horse was provisional and toy like, but its scale and narrative eccentricity conveyed value; the buzzing entrails of its hiding soldiers are measure of the wit and humour of Odysseus' organic metaphor of architecture as communication. Perhaps in architecture then, to name the metaphor, is to kill everything around it, like the over-analyst of a joke. Once the nomadic ambiguity of the Greek's horse was destroyed, so too came downfall and gone with it the envelope premise of safety.

To extract a real object from digital space and replicate it as an engineered thing is a complex project. In physics, a *moment profile* is a mathematical expression which involves the product of distance and physical quantity. The *moment* is defined with respect to a fixed reference point and a physical instance of force or quantity of force located a specified distance away from this point. The *moment profile* indicates in useful terms how a substance behaves under exertion, indicating a technical weakness in a material's tensile integrity, or suggesting just how floppy or curved an intended straight line could become. It is poetic then, to extrapolate the linguistic beauty of the terminology and imagine a *moment profile* both as a definition of the point at which empirical material fails – a space of elastically optimistic chance – but also as a mark in time indicating the relationship between geometry and theatre, a calculation of the place of things on stage.

Perhaps all narrative occurrences are constructed with the default pre-loaded index of components that could be termed *moment profiles*: images, objects, texts; information, symbols and the erratic, obstinate otherness that exists blurred between expression and disguise. And what of a *third moment* profile? Not the third slot on a deck of signification, but an occurrence of defining the world, of replicating a desire or impulse through a combined trinity of different theoretical terms: as tangible object heavy in a sunless city; as serpent text with perpetual signification; as buoyant image, symbolic but beyond the grain of touch.

– Helen Marten, 2022

Helen Marten lives and works in London. Marten studied at the University of Oxford and Central St. Martins, London. In 2016 she was awarded the Tate Turner Prize and The Hepworth Prize for sculpture. Marten works across sculpture, painting, video and writing. Her work is included in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art and Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, both New York; Tate Collection, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, amongst others. She was included in the 55th and 56th Venice Biennales and the 12th Lyon Biennale. Her first novel, *The Boiled in Between*, was published by Prototype in September 2020. She is currently at work on her second novel, *A Polite History of Vandalism*.

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