

Michael Wilkinson
Still Life with Blank Canvas
The Modern Institute, Osborne Street
24th January – 5th March 2025
Preview: Thursday 23rd January 2025, 5.30-7.30pm

An unoccupied stage set has often seemed to me to transmit a greater dramatic charge than the play that comes to pass upon it. Perhaps it is for similar reasons that some of the artworks I like best are still-lifes from the renaissance period.
 – Claire-Louise Bennett

This new body of work by Michael Wilkinson develops the artist's concern with still life painting, both its poignant relationship to transience and its traditional engagement with trickery and humour through the use of *trompe l'oeil*. His approach can be understood as a kind of meta engagement with the genre. The paintings are elegantly 'self-conscious', pointing to the conditions of their making. To produce them, Wilkinson photographed a series of flowers (Dahlia, Lisianthus, Lily, Chrysanthemum) in vases set before blank linen framed in aluminium. These images provided the basis for the paintings, with the linen in the photographs coming to being 'represented' by areas of actual blank linen. The material functions both materially and figuratively; it is both the thing itself and its representation. The finished works are also framed in the same style of plain aluminium frame recorded in the paintings.

Wilkinson uses a technique he describes as *fluorochiaroscuro*TM in the paintings, embellishing a conventional representational style with fluorescent colours to emphasize the effect of light falling on his various subjects. This heightened effect produces a kind of 'psychedelic realism', corresponding to an altered perception of the ordinary. Wilkinson's interest in still life painting was triggered by the sense of suspended animation he experienced across 2020-2021. He found himself more attuned to domestic objects and had a heightened awareness of the passing of time. The photographs which formed the basis of these works were all taken across autumn and winter 2024, capturing the seasons' distinctive lighting conditions. The low afternoon sun casts dynamic shadows.

In 2014, Michael Ned Holte wrote that his understanding of Wilkinson's work was 'incremental and marked as much by misapprehension as by fixity'. This holds with the artist's shift to still life painting. He renders a conventional, even conservative, subject somewhat uncanny – the flowers oscillate between generic motifs and specific instances, and *trompe l'oeil* of the linen never allows the eye to settle. A punning conflation of the sculptural and pictorial was also explored by Wilkinson in his 'Mirrored Wall' series. In these Wilkinson created two distinct zones by removing silver from the back of mirrored glass, creating pictorial sections of reflective brick and transparent spaces which reveal gallery walls and wooden stretcher bars. As with his still lifes, these pieces drew the viewers' attention to the materiality of the artwork, playing with the expectation of or desire for illusion and representing a resistance to the art object's reification.

Michael Wilkinson (b. 1965, Merseyside, UK) currently lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland. His solo exhibitions include 'Michael Wilkinson', The Modern Institute, 3 Aird's Lane, Glasgow (2018); 'SORRY HAD TO DONE', The Modern Institute, Osborne Street (2015); 'CITADEL: The fortress commanding a city, which it serves both to protect and to dominate', Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 2014, 'En Attendant' Pearl Lam, Shanghai, 2013, 'Dresden' The Modern Institute, Aird's Lane, Glasgow, 2012, No History (2012) at Blum & Poe, LA, 'Never Works' Le Temple, Paris, 2011, 'Lions After Slumber', The Modern Institute (2009) and Wrong Gallery, New York, (2004). Recent group exhibitions include 'STATUS need a world interlude', The Modern Institute, Aird's Lane, Glasgow, 2022; 'Rubble Stir', The Glue Factory, Glasgow, 2010; 'Wayfinders', 135 Castlebank Street, Glasgow, 2006; and 'All That Is Solid Melts Into Air', FRAC des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, 2004. His book '1979' was published by Blackdog Publishing, London. In 2017, Wilkinson had a major new monograph published by The Modern Institute in collaboration with Mousse Publishing, Milan.