

SUSAN GUNN



STATEMENT

Susan Gunn's paintings explore and develop the medium of traditionally made gesso. The medium is unusually resilient and fragile and is used in an innovative way as the subject of the painting itself.

Historically, gesso is a formative 'ground' on which to paint, produced by applying many layers of chalk and Rabbit Skin Glue, to the canvas. Up to around twenty layers of the specialized paint are applied and as the gesso dries, each layer bonds with the last to form an exterior skin.

Gunn uses varying factors to create landscapes of fissured surfaces. Cracked areas and accidental nuances appear in the works that are engineered but ultimately beyond the final control of the artist.

Factors such as the tension in the canvas, the consistency of the gesso and the speed and temperature at which a work is allowed to 'dry-out' combine to determine the final outcome.

Historically cracks appearing in newly made gesso are regarded as defects, "entirely undesirable"¹ according to the art historian Ralph Mayer. Gunn welcomes these marks as distinguishing characteristics and signs of individuality in the works, rendering each piece distinct from the next. Each painting is unique and irreplaceable. Through manipulating the environmental conditions, the materiality and vulnerability of the process is exaggerated.

The final stages involve the grinding down and polishing of the surface, by hand, to its marble finish. The divisions and spatial outlay in the canvases are informed by the formulae of the golden section; the regimented geometry marries defiantly against the organic free roaming nature of the fissures that appear tenuously embedded in the surface, sometimes spilling over the strict linear divisions - they refuse to be contained.

The paintings evoke associating references of control and chance and have been perceived to conjure ideas of aerial grounds and psychological landscapes; they embrace the beauty of the flawed and generate an understanding and appreciation of a new modernism, form and aesthetic.

¹ Mayer, Ralph. *The Artists Handbook of Materials & Techniques* 5th Edition Faber & Faber 1991...1st Edition Penguin 1940