

# ATP DIARY

Talks

## Interview with John Finneran | Arcade, London

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ATPdiary



Installation view A Figure Searching Day & Night, Arcade, London 2016 – Image credit courtesy of Arcade, London.

Segue testo in italiano —

You dreamed of the woman between  
the river and the sun and the rock  
Then I thought of the mountain  
and next to the mountain was the sun  
and the sun was held by the woman from between the river and the sun and the rock

In the dream there were figures in the water  
and when it was cool they came out to the beach  
This was dreamed many times  
and when you dreamed it you were peaceful

John Finneran, 2015

For his second solo exhibition at **Arcade** titled 'A Figure Searching Day and Night', John Finneran (US, 1979) presents his new body of works.

ATPdiary, in collaboration with Giulia Ponzano, asked the artist some questions.

**Giulia Ponzano: Your early works employed various mediums in the production of paintings, objects and assemblages with a more figurative child-like aesthetic. In the past few years, these interests evolved into a focus on paintings and your works became complicated through an emphasis on compositions: lips, eyes, noses, female figures, circles, crescents and triangles are recurrent motifs. The same iconography and symbolism remain in your works from 2016, but shapes are abstracted by degrees and simplified. Though these ambiguous forms and enigmatic compositions on the canvas seemingly reflects your thoughts – Can these new series be considered as more 'personal'?**

John Finneran: I think all the paintings are personal. They are all built out of what I'm able to feel while I'm making them. So I'd rather say that the newest works are part of a process of eliminating reference that isn't based in an emotion. The eye is a good way to explain this because it's the most illustrative. When I first used that symbol, a line drawing of an eye, it was very broad. I could attach a lot of emotion to it because it's a direct way to reference a person, or a mirrored self. But it's also a symbol for "eye." So it has a lot of baggage about line and representation, and so many other meanings related to it. All these knowledge leads to interpretations that get in the way of what I really want which is a space for feeling. So I hope I'm getting closer, uncluttering everything.

**GP: There isn't a clear meaning in your paintings: forms are recognisable, but these can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Compositions contain more than what is visibly present, they seem like puzzles that can never be resolved. Do they give any answers/ solutions to us? Or the answer lied in the incomprehensible?**

JF: If I thought there was an answer in the work it would be found in my biography, but that's just not something I'm interested in because of how many doors it closes. I can connect some paintings to events in my life or places I've been and that would be an answer or a meaning but it wouldn't have anything to do with why I made the painting. I'm more interested in the emotion and feeling in the paintings because you can share that with the viewer. The reason doesn't matter, because it's different for me than it is for you, what matters is the depth of it and recognising something that we share. Ultimately I don't believe in answers, I aspire not to believe in answers.

**GP: Christian and Egyptian mythology, the celestial and esoteric: who else has been your major influences? Do you have any musically as well?**

I remember wondering why in my mind the simplest image of a woman is so Egyptian looking, only in profile...I'm guessing because that's the type of image with the least other information in it. I saw those pictures early enough in my life that I don't associate them with anything too distracting, they're 'pure'. I'm trying to go further back, to before the first trip to the museum and figure out what those images are. As far as music, I think it's free jazz and doom/drone metal. I think the overwhelming amount of aural information in there cancels out my thoughts in a way that I like. But I love country music too, which contradicts the idea I just proposed. I'll say jazz and metal at the beginning, honky tonk music for the finishing touches.

**GP: Looking at '3 Noses, 3 Mouths' (2012), 'Eyes' (2016) or 'Hands' (2016) – you visually isolate four of the senses in light black outlines – juxtaposing multiple sensory organs: what is the meaning of this repetition?**

JF: This is more cancelling. The repetition adds the impossibility of it being one specific figure.

**GP: 'Dreamer, Dreaming Day and Night', 'Day', 'A Figure Searching day and Night'... lightness and darkness, day and night are the backgrounds on which the sensory organs are lying – The moon, the sun and the stars truly mark the passage of time. What is its function/role in relation to our perception?**

JF: I'm adding a kind of repetition to the whole of my body of work by using day and night as thematic and compositional anchors for the paintings. There's definitely something to the idea that different areas of emotion seem available or more likely at different times of day and night, and that can establish the mood of a particular painting. But I think in my work repetition is there to reinforce the insignificance of those details. You can say "oh this one's at night" and that could mean that you start interpreting from there, from "night". But the next painting is "day" and then "night" again in the next one. Just like for us, it's actually either day or night. I'm interested in any moment during which we recognise ourself in relation to what we're looking at, more than just what you're looking at.



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