

THOMPSON'S
LONDON — EST. 1982

BRITA GRANSTRÖM

INSCAPE: RE-OPENING THE
SHUTTERS ON NATURE

B.G. 2021



Beryl and Bernat Klein Acrylic on canvas 10 x 12 inches

Note on the term derived by Gerard Manley Hopkins.
*Inscap*e -- the unique essence of a person, thing,
 place, or event sensed and depicted in art or poetry.

Opening the Shutters
 Acrylic on canvas
 20 x 28 inches



BRITA GRANSTRÖM

INSCAPE: RE-OPENING THE SHUTTERS ON NATURE

9 March – 26 March 2022

MEET THE ARTIST on Wednesday 9th March 5 - 7 pm

THOMPSON'S
 LONDON EST. 1982

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Monday to Friday: 10:00 - 18:00
 Saturday: 10:30 - 17:30
 Sunday: Closed

All paintings are available for sale on receipt of this catalogue.
 The entire exhibition can be viewed online with framed images at
www.thompsonsgallery.co.uk

RE-OPENING THE SHUTTERS ON NATURE IN THE PAINTINGS OF BRITA GRANSTRÖM

During much of 2020, the eery crisis year of extensive lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic, Brita Granström eschewed painting en *plein air* – even avoiding painting in her top-floor sea-view studio – in favour of using a portable studio within the familial confines of home, making, as she said, ‘a series of paintings capturing our own daily life – with our boys home from school – around the kitchen, porch and garden’. Even garden scenes were then solely observed from the sheltered intimacy of home – poignant miniaturist glimpses of wider nature through open and shut windows.

As 2021 progressed, Brita increasingly felt able to re-explore nearby elemental nature beyond a household setting, and it is moving to watch a recent brief video of her standing on a rock by the sea, painting the swirling waters on a canvas set out before her - to the susurrating soundtrack of the wind and the plashing waters.

The new paintings in this show – made in late 2021 – contain a number of domestic interior scenes – pictures retaining the quite preternatural clarity of focus the artist had developed during the lockdowns of 2020, when flowers and decorative artefacts were seen with uncanny vibrancy – as well as a group of pictures set amongst spectacular coastal rockpools, in which a red-haired bather is seen swimming naked, absorbed in the elements. The latter, she says, ‘celebrate a return to painting outdoors and my first love, figurative seascapes. I am

fascinated how tidal rockpools live between two worlds, low and high tide controlled by the pull of the moon. Each rockpool is unique and jewel-like; their weedy depths somehow feel uterine, feminine and fecund. These paintings feature a new model who is also someone I have known for years. She is a wild sea-swimmer with the most stunning red hair – and plunging is what she does.’

In *The Star Gazer* (page 3), the serene and stalwart model sits on the edge of a rockpool, transfixed by its starry depths, including a mass of pebbles of varied sizes and hues as well as seaweed fronds possessing the ability to change shape and orientation to allow them to move with – rather than resisting – the potent water currents. The variegated pebbles - starry orbs, as it were - appear as images of nature’s steadfastness and beautiful diversity, and the fluctuating fronds seem to symbolise qualities of natural resilience and adaptability. The naked model, peering into the depths, is seen in a meditative state of realising (or comprehending) her own extensive inner resources.

In *Westerly Wind* (page 11), depicting Brita tending to the washing on the line (what appear to be pristine white sheets and a pillowcase), the artist has returned to representing elements of domesticity beyond the context of home, to which she was almost literally – as well as emotionally - confined for a large part of a year. Against a vast oceanic backdrop and



The Star Gazer Acrylic on canvas 40 x 40 inches

billowing sky, the bedlinen dries. She says, 'I was thinking of the song Mrs. Bartolozzi [Kate Bush's 2005 song about a washing machine, its lyrics and rhythms hauntingly evoking someone attempting to process difficult human emotions]. I love to paint laundry flapping on the line, and the feeling that it only remains there by the grace of the West Wind! It was gusty but benevolent on this day. However, a day or so after this painting, Storm Anwen blew into the North-East of England, reaching 103 miles per hour, causing ten metres of our tall 18th century garden wall to collapse!'

Two antique Staffordshire figures of greyhounds with rabbits in their mouths, fill the mantelpiece foreground of the painting *Opening the Shutters* (page 1). These forceful yet enchantingly naïve images redolent of visceral rustic pastimes are more than mere decorative components here. The artist says she hadn't initially thought about the link here with death. 'But yes, death is part of life and the feeling for me when I painted this was of letting light flood in and breathing life back in the room.' Following the fearful first year of the pandemic, both a conscious acknowledgement of mortality and a reassuring need to revive and reanimate enduring elements of everyday life, became paramount for many people.

'Opening and closing the two-hundred-year-old shutters at close and dawn of day is a ritual I like to think is common to all the house's previous owners – and a link between me and those who have gone before. The period Staffordshire dogs and the fact that I only appear as a mirror reflection makes it somehow at once transient and timeless.'

In Brita's paintings of herself opening shutters and curtains,

there is a beguiling echo of Vuillard's image of a woman (dressed in black, seen from the back) opening *The Yellow Curtain* in the mysteriously tender c.1893 painting of that name.

In *Honesty* (page 15), the artist is portrayed observing herself as she arranges flowers – Honesty and Teasel from the garden – in a capacious and luminous apothecary jar. This is a densely packed picture – full of rich patterning and manifold details of antique taxidermy and floral motifs – yet the overall effect is focussed and elegantly simplified. There is a plethora of small, scintillating forms here: seen in the dried Honesty flowers themselves, the lucid bands of white stitches on Brita's dress in addition to the beady eyes of two stuffed birds standing out as piercingly as the artist's own (gentler-looking) eyes.

This picture is one that subtly examines the paradox of nature 'preserved' – as represented by the dried flowers and the stuffed creatures – yet remaining curiously, perennially alive – as manifested in the dynamic rhythms of the glistening Honesty and the birds appearing still quite sentient. Brita says that she 'had thought about how people say, 'look you in the eye' to infer the virtue of honesty – so there is a play here on the word honesty'.

Victorian Seascape (page 16) is a nicely deceptive picture at first glance. Initially it appears to show (in the top left-hand corner) a window view of a surly seascape. Soon the viewer realises that this 'seascape' is in fact a picture on the wall, 'a charming and very atmospheric 'naïve' painting of a steamer, by a Victorian artist who has signed it Emily Pink and dated it 1890; I bought a pair by this artist at pocket-money prices

a few months ago. In my picture, I have placed this 'naïve' painting in front of the window I often paint my still-life 'views' through. I had hoped to create that initial reaction – that illusion.'

This tempestuous, moonlit 'antique' sea study, with its brooding darks and lights, contrasts starkly with the airy, almost translucent 'Modernist' pale turquoise foreground expanse of windowsill or tabletop arrayed with what Brita calls 'finds from the seashore', including fronds of seaweed, shells, and sailors' clay pipes. The large jar containing flowers such as Nicotiana and Broadleaf Dock with its myriad seeds is painted with the kind of heightened perception and precision, infused with *joie de vivre*, that we see in a Christopher Wood still-life.

In her recent paintings – in which she goes out into the natural world and re-explores inscapes of elemental forms as well as starting to re-orientate herself at home – that followed a period of unusual and intense introspectiveness (characteristic of the lockdown year of 2020) – Brita finds herself re-opening the shutters on nature and daily life with a new and exploratory freshness that is quite exhilarating.

Philip Vann
Cambridge, January 2022

Philip Vann is a writer on the visual arts, and author of the text (August 2020) in 'The Leaves of Lockdown. Brita Granström's Inscape Paintings from a Time of Crisis'

Bird Watching Acrylic on canvas 12 x 12 inches (top)

Bear and Amber Acrylic on canvas 12 x 12 inches (bottom)





Ingrid with Narcissi Acrylic on canvas 24 x 32 inches



Bather and Rockpools Acrylic on canvas 20 x 20 inches



Hilda and Nasturtiums Acrylic on canvas 16 x 16 inches



Storm Barra Acrylic on canvas 16 x 16 inches



Winter Bathers Acrylic on canvas 16 x 20 inches



Dog Biscuits Acrylic on canvas 24 x 24 inches



By Lamplight Acrylic on canvas 24 x 24 inches



Westerly Wind Acrylic on canvas 32 x 47 inches



Dill with Dahlias Acrylic on canvas 32 x 32 inches



Red-Haired Swimmer Acrylic on canvas 48 x 60 inches



Four Oaks, Zorn and Nelly Acrylic on canvas 28 x 28 inches



Honesty Acrylic on canvas 32 x 32 inches



Victorian Seascape Acrylic on canvas 24 x 24 inches



The Pull of the Moon Acrylic on canvas 32 x 40 inches



Cold Spring Acrylic on canvas 10 x 8 inches



Foxglove and Sneezewort Acrylic on canvas 12 x 12 inches

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