



Annette Pugh

Happenstance

Until 7 January 2024

This exhibition presents a group of seven newly commissioned oil paintings by Birmingham-based artist Annette Pugh. The works explore traces of human presence in the landscape and the often-emotional connection we have with unpopulated places such as remote woodlands, private ponds or the hidden crevices of public gardens.

Pugh has drawn on an archive of personal photographs of various places taken over many years, selecting disparate images that meld together through the exhibition in their quiet and uncanny beauty. The paintings memorialise fortuitous discoveries made by the artist during walks: a makeshift jetty, an abandoned tree swing. These manmade interventions in the landscape become metaphors for solitude and solace, inanimate stand-ins for the figures that were, until now, the main subject of Pugh's paintings.

The Swing, 2023 relates to Jean-Honoré Fragonard's c.1767-8 oil painting of the same name, a romantic and wondrous picture that Pugh admires. Fragonard's painting depicts an elegantly dressed woman on a swing flanked by two male figures surrounded by opulent foliage. Although Pugh's

painting is devoid of human presence it connects with Fragonard's in its romantic interpretation of the landscape.

The Landing Stage, 2023 is also the result of a serendipitous encounter with a secluded landscape, which involved the artist climbing fences and crossing streams to discover a private pond with a mysterious jetty. The work is deliberately panoramic and is the largest painting by Pugh to date. The work's filmic quality is intensified by a smaller painting shown beside it (***One Last Time, 2023***), which seems to continue in time from *The Landing Stage*, moving the viewer to a new frame.

Each painting is the result of a prolonged engagement with the landscape and a creative process that can move between moments of "manic activity" and mindfulness. The artist revisits places numerous times, taking in the seasons and different times of the day to capture the changing light and fully absorb the scene into her psyche. Though static, the images remain, for Pugh, "just on the edge of restlessness," perhaps reflecting the obsessive yet meditative process involved in their making.