

Text by Bryony Bodimeade

Nick's paintings cast for a resemblance of a landscape being moved through, repeatedly and differently. On and off road, by car and bike. Attentively, with open eyes and mind, and distractedly, where things are glimpsed and responded to in a flash. The images jostle, with this propelling movement through an environment, but also with the jostling life and matter forces within it. Captured by camera on the handlebars or through the car window are things half recognised as subject matter: photographs which are then looked over and moved around, this time in the studio, in a search for structure, vocabulary, an action plan. For a sense of what to do with arm and brush. Feeling out the fundamental aspects of the landscape and thinking about how these aspects respond to us and we to them.

Within a painting practice of over forty years; within a history of Nick making these paintings and looking at these places, a language has grown: a repertoire of marks and gestures that he works with comfortably, knows thoroughly, uses intuitively, and that allow, crucially, for the unknown to come through. After selecting, choreographing and planning – on screen, paper, palette – the paintings are created quickly, wet into wet. It is a process that invites the unexpected but also courts ruin. The paintings flourish – accumulating inner logic - or they fail, destined to be scraped or stripped away. They are not executed, but *tried* for. 'Success, when it happens,' Nick says, 'is when the painting combines a sense of recognition – "I know this place" – not in the particular, but more like a recalled homecoming, with an embodiment of its attempt to recreate the sensation of desirously moving through space. Like a kind of frozen mime.'

There is a lasting wetness, newness and speed to these paintings, and a visual presence of strong feeling for things, and their conditions. This materiality and feeling-for seems connected to a double recognition: that life continues around and elsewhere regardless of our personal perceptions, but that it is, inescapably, through our personal perceptions that we experience life. There is, to me, a sense of embrace in these works, both in their compositional relationship between edges and centre, solidity and space, and their approach – of an openness to, and a grasping for, which is powerful and tender. An approach through which the artist does not want to restrict or hold still the subject, the image, but to allow it with both care and boldness, thoughtful action and passivity, to become more itself. To be not ambient or atmospheric, distilled like an emptied-out garden lawn, but to be full and complex. To have substance and agency; beauty and conflict. To develop a sense of unity, but one that is unstable. There is the splutter and force of brush against wood and canvas, the slip and spill of liquid in liquid, the scratch marks that could be headlights catching on smears on the windscreen, the tunnel that seems thrust through the trees by vehicles, the vapour trails cutting through the thick stuff of sky. The sky, which is powerful matter, tumbling, nibbling and overwhelming. For matter here is struggling, it is at work in the soil and on the road and on the canvas. And the work of the paintings, rather than to represent or to tell, seems to be the work of *relating*, and partly what they relate is the nature within us to that around us, and a sense that they and we too are part of the creative-destructive process.