



jane bustin *this woman's work*



*As long as I live I will have control over my being.*  
– Artemisia Gentileschi

*I am always conscious of this secret disruption in me*  
– Katherine Mansfield

The images in this document present Jane Bustin's work as mugshots... straight-up, face on, unflinching, precise – shaped by Modernism's call for clarity. Whilst there is an intriguing distortion and shimmer visible in the smaller copper sections where the polished surfaces snare fragments of light and ambient imagery, the greater proportion of these compositions have a highly stilled composure about them ... until you move that is.

Once we are "off-centre" the edges of the panels are revealed and so we appreciate their depth and material character, as well as glimpsing unexpected slices of colour and discreet areas with feathery, stained touches. These attributes animate the shallow space Bustin's constructions occupy and lend greater form and density to the object. Viewed obliquely, we are also made aware of the first signs of disruption.

This activation is not just visual but deeply associative. The modernist formality that is signalled on first sight dissipates swiftly as the paintings' composition encourages this more intimate, circular interview. These are paintings that invite curiosity, not just about their own constitution and intention, but about looking with an inquisitorial eye. The unilateral authority claimed by Greenberg's Modernism is defied by their modesty and unassuming scale, but perhaps it is their rejection of moral dominance as a justifiable ambition for painting.

left. Artemisia Gentileschi  
*Self-Portrait As The Allegory Of Painting (La Pittura)*, c.1638-9  
oil on canvas  
98.6 x 75.2 cm

right. *Artemisia 2*, (detail) 2020  
acrylic on Japanese paper  
30 x 21 cm

The contest over the province of Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings, after whom Jane Bustin has titled this group of works, has lasted centuries, yet Gentileschi's ultimate ascendancy is located in its aesthetics, not in its potential as 20th century manifesto. What Gentileschi, Mansfield and for that matter Bustin have in common, are persistent conditions that have impeded the making and reception of "these women's work". Mansfield herself asserted – "I'm a writer first and a woman after," and four hundred years earlier Artemisia Gentileschi may well have said "sono prima una scrittrice e poi una donna."



The relationship to portraiture, not just the wondrous Gentileschi *Self Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* is clear and inescapable. I am also reminded of Imi Knoebel's *Grace Kelly Portraits* where colour and iridescence, proportion and adjustment insinuate character and disposition. By size and proportion, by volume, these paintings sit at the wall like graceful portrait paintings for whom the sitters' character and dimension might only be revealed by inquisition and time.

And like the best portraiture, like the very finest writing, they feel invested with memory and license. It is precisely these qualities that allow Jane to forge such a conversation with Katherine Mansfield.

Time and space feel both constrained and oddly elastic under this protracted Covid regime – confinement rendering the days weirdly homogenous. Now we are forced to travel via memory and fiction and so there is a greater responsibility falling on imagination and invention.

Of course, we have always travelled this way, utilising fiction as the runway to a kind of suspended animation. Now our itinerary is boundless and so in these paintings we see Jane Bustin transporting herself to the opposite end of the world, to New Zealand – somewhere that at times risked being more English than England with its unlikely experiment in transplanted imperialism. Through words Bustin has found Mansfield and through colour and light she reciprocates.

Jane has never been to New Zealand before and it is precisely these two values – colour and light that distinguish its distant environment so much from her home in England. Less beleaguered by industrialisation and its inevitable pollution and exacerbated by lack of ozone and a relentless cleansing sea breeze, New Zealand's light is often harsh – dramatic certainly – but the sun passes through the heavens with ease, damaging Celtic skin in just minutes. Colour too can appear crisp in the absence of Europe's history and haze.

*Artemisia Gentileschi III*, 2021  
copper, acrylic on wood  
50 x 40 cm

New Zealand's own, somewhat thinly published art history was shaped in the 1960s by an equally thin theory, one based on a kind of "geographical determinism". The uptake of crisp formalism was apparently inevitable given the light conditions – how else might we see in such relentlessly definitive conditions. The romanticism of Colin McCahon was simply evidence of nostalgia and longing born of distance and isolation.

So whilst we can look upon Jane Bustin's paintings as being infused with a chromatic vocabulary that feels more European than antipodean, there is something in the disruption of the picture plane, the unexpected modernity of the material choices that speaks to the new world as much as to the old. This bridging of old world with new was central to Katherine Mansfield's capacity to evoke memory – both strong and strange – and that desire and ability is what she shares with Jane Bustin.

I know these painting will feel at home in New Zealand – their clarity and delicacy welcome, their reflection and intimacy unexpectedly familiar.

- Andrew Jensen

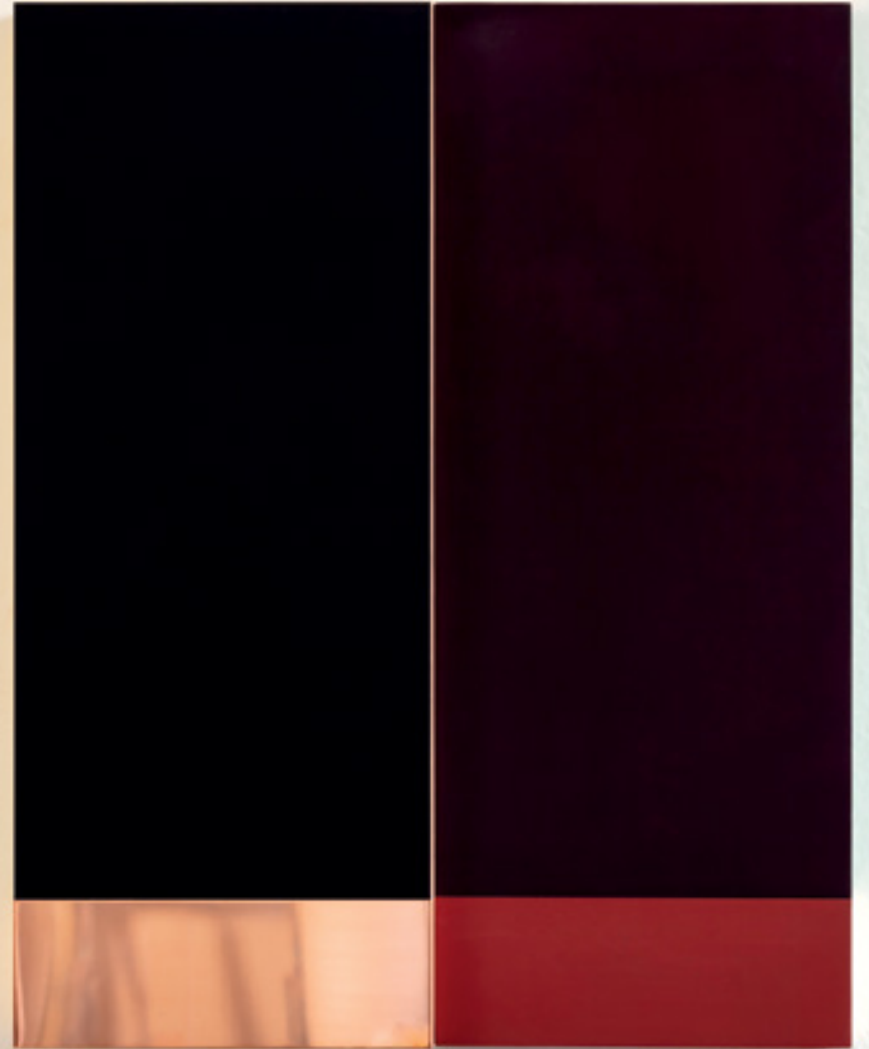


*I think it is all a matter of love;  
the more you love a memory  
the stronger and stranger it becomes*  
– Vladimir Nabokov



above. Bustin Studio  
Hoxton, London, 2019

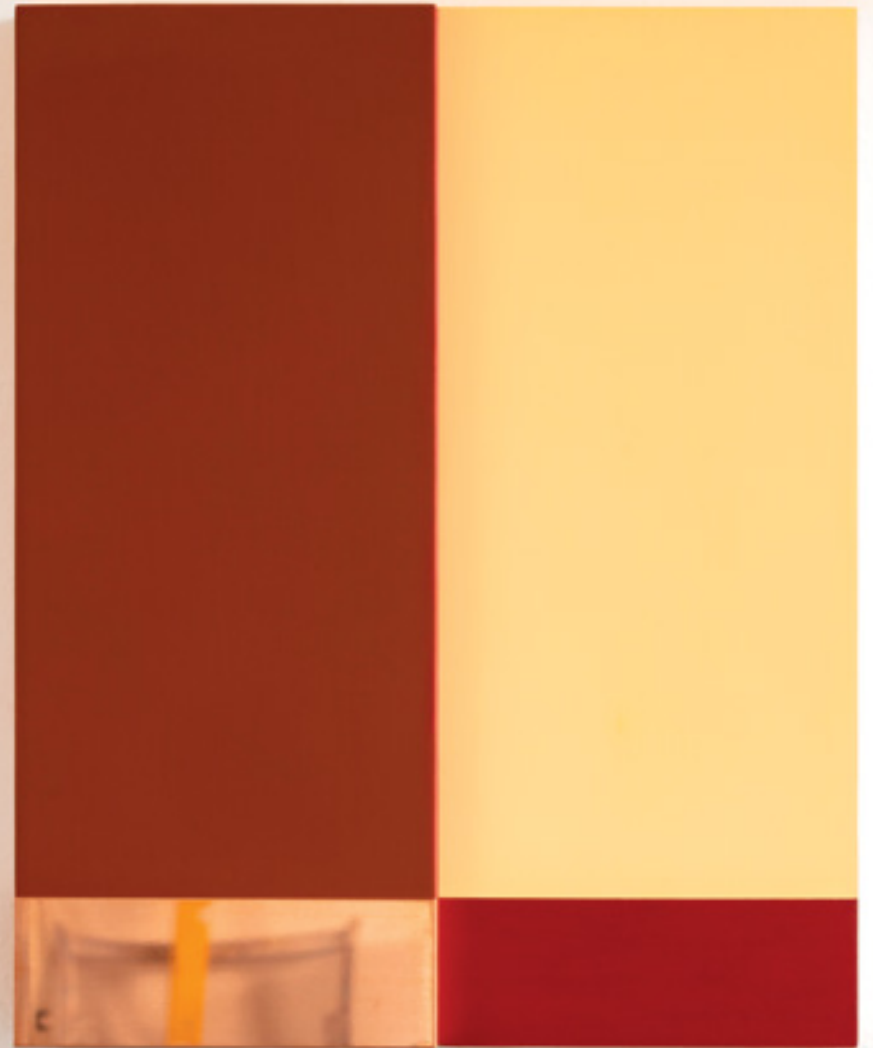
right. *Artemisia Gentileschi I*, 2021  
copper, acrylic on wood  
50 x 40 cm





above. Artemisia Gentileschi  
*Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1616  
oil on canvas  
71.5 x 71 cm

right. *Artemisia Gentileschi II*, 2021  
copper, wood and acrylic  
50 x 40cm





above. Bustin Studio  
Hoxton, London, 2019

right. *Artemisia 4*, 2020  
acrylic on Japanese paper  
30 x 21 cm





Katherine Mansfield  
*Leves Amores* (1907)

I can never forget the Thistle Hotel. I can never forget that strange winter night.

I had asked her to dine with me, and then go to the Opera. My room was opposite hers. She said she would come but – could I lace up her evening bodice, it was hooks at the back. Very well.

It was still daylight when I knocked at the door and entered. In her petticoat bodice and a full silk petticoat she was washing, sponging her face and neck. She said she was finished, and I might sit on the bed and wait for her. So I looked round at the dreary room. The one filthy window faced the street. She could see the choked, dust-grimed window of a wash-house opposite. For furniture the room contained a low bed, draped with revolting, yellow, vine-patterned curtains, a chair, a wardrobe with a piece of cracked mirror attached, a washstand. But the wallpaper hurt me physically. It hung in tattered strips from the wall. In its less discoloured and faded patches I could trace the pattern of roses – buds and flowers – and the frieze was a conventional design of birds, of what genus God alone knows.

And this was where she lived. I watched her curiously. She was pulling on long, thin stockings and saying 'damn' when she could not find her suspenders. And I felt within me a certainty that nothing beautiful could ever happen in that room, and for her I felt contempt, a little tolerance, a very little pity.

A dull grey light hovered over everything; it seemed to accentuate the thin tawdriness of her clothes, the squalor of her life, she, too, looked dull and grey and tired. And I sat on the bed, and thought: 'Come, this Old Age. I have forgotten passion, I have been left behind in the beautiful golden procession of youth. Now I am seeing life in the dressing-room of the theatre.'

So we dined somewhere and went to the Opera. It was late, when we came out into the crowded night street, late and cold. She gathered up her long skirts. Silently we walked back to the Thistle Hotel, down the white pathway fringed with beautiful golden lilies, up the amethyst-shadowed staircase.

Was Youth dead? ... Was Youth dead?

She told me as we walked along the corridor to her room that she was glad the night had come. I did not ask why. I was glad, too. It seemed a secret between us. So I went with her into her room to undo those troublesome hooks. She lit a candle on an enamel bracket. The light filled the room with darkness. Like a sleepy child she slipped out of her frock and then, suddenly, turned to me and flung her arms round my neck. Every bird upon the bulging frieze broke into song. Every rose upon the tattered paper budded and formed into blossom. Yes, even the green vine upon the bed curtains wreathed itself into strange chaplets and garlands, twined round us in a leafy embrace, held us with a thousand clinging tendrils.

And Youth was not dead.

Mansfield, Katherine, "*Leves Amores*" (1907)  
Stories, Viking, 1987, p. 259-260.

left. *Leves Amores*, Katherine Mansfield, 2021  
acrylic, wood, copper, beetroot and dyed burnt silk  
57 x 40 cm



*This is not a letter but my arms about you for a brief moment.*

– Katherine Mansfield

Dear Katherine,

As you glance, these paintings made from other women's work, will look perfect with their straight lines and block colour. But stay a while, come closer and you will see their flaws.

The panels are made by hand and the paint applied by hand and brush, the corners are not always absolutely square, there are small faint lines as the brush has pulled the paint across its surface like a reluctant child, the light scatters across the painted panel at an uneven pace.

They are almost.

Almost perfect, almost square, almost flat, they hold small hairs and specks of dust, millimetre by millimetre your eyes can travel across and discover its imperfections, hidden scars, missed opportunities, the meeting of lines just ever so slightly missing.

They hum and pulse, and a small light radiates and expands across the wall, their golden halos, offerings of something enlightened, but still with shadows of disappointment, each correction feeds another problem.

They are paintings that are alive, sanded, stroked, brushed, taped, dusted, polished they are ready to 'show', to illuminate from the passivity of the white wall.

They hold the tensions of trying to be better, controlling error, creating harmony and craving balance.

They exist as hidden memories of meaningful encounters prompted by the dark wood interiors, stained soiled silk and early morning light that pierces through the narrow gap of old yellowed curtains.

These paintings will travel across the seas to your birthplace, New Zealand, the other side of the world from where they were conceived, here in London, where you spent your school years and beyond.

How I envy your words, they are always with you, at the end of your finger tips, in your head, as close as the air that you breathe in and out.

Materiality has its limitations, a painting is tangible, we can hold it, look at it, own it, yet for the artist, as soon as they have objectified it, that thought made real has left them, gone.

It sits on the wooden panel ready to meet its audience like an excited Debutante, abandoning its maker and ready to jump into a new life.

The painter is left empty, their thoughts have abandoned them like an adulterous lover.

Can we ever explain our paintings, they are thoughts from flesh and blood made concrete, they are tokens of feeling, a passing on, a sharing of ...

They are priceless and worthless simultaneously and I cannot live with them or without them.

But for you Katherine, your words, your thoughts, it's a fair exchange, I'm happy that your place is my place.

Sincerely yours,

Jane



*I'm a writer first and a woman after.*

– Katherine Mansfield

left. Anne Rice

*Portrait of Katherine Mansfield, 1918*

oil on canvas

65.5 x 52 cm



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