

ORDINANCE

presents

Ruby Wilkinson
LOVE IS RUNNING TOWARDS



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Things that go round and meet at the top

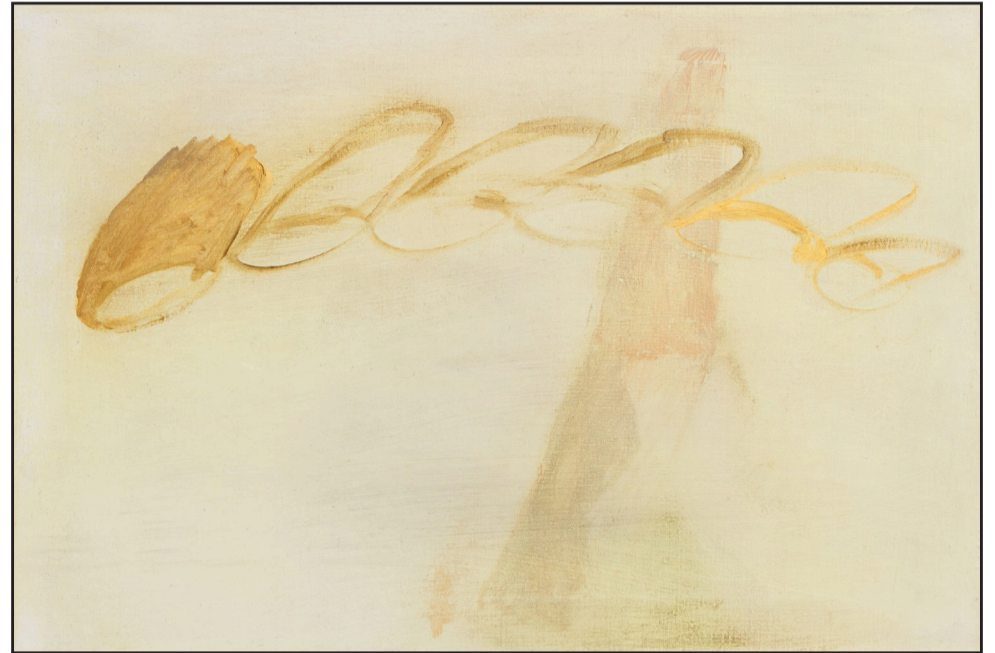
Skye Malu Baker

If for reasons unknown I were to be plucked from my usual context and gently positioned in an unfamiliar place, if I found myself bereft of the habitual objects that shape my thoughts and without the familiar architecture that contains my movement, how might my sense of self – my alignment of purpose and resolve – unravel? And, finding myself so disorientated, what internal navigational instrument might I reach for? I like to think that, like the fat gold watch of which I once read, love would set this instrument going, whatever it might be.¹ Equipped so, with senses astute and a mind broad and calm, how might I allow this unfamiliar place to unfold itself to my senses?

It is this traveller's state of wonderment and sensory sensitivity that Ruby Wilkinson's *LOVE IS RUNNING TOWARDS* quietly conjures. A strain of church bells above the chimneys of an unfamiliar city; the endless conversational games that keep companions occupied on the ferry ride across a wine-blue sea; the empty arches of a long-abandoned village church; these scenes and more echo forth, bouncing like conversations between the paintings of this suite. Full of playful curiosity and movement, these works capture ideation in motion.

Wilkinson's restless brush strokes and painterly line are a beautiful actualisation of James Elkins' observation that '...painting motions are like conversations, where the hands keep turning in the air to make a point.'² Tracing its titular form in russet hues, the painting *Valve* (2024) records a gestural action against the stark white of the canvas ground. Composed with minimal strokes, the line of this singular form changes texture as it morphs from the bold mark of a freshly loaded brush to the dry sigh of near-empty bristles. In the larger *Trial* (2024) this same tap-like form is repeatedly executed in two uniform columns. Here the very gesture, the very turning of the hand and flourish of the brush itself, seems to record the action of this object and the flow of its function. Similarly, *Score with bells*, in a delicious interplay between raw umber and a pink and yellow tinged warm white, depicts a string of diminutive bell-like shapes that are actualised in slow, mimetic, dance-like arcs.

These repeated motifs, arising again and again in the paintings that comprise *LOVE IS RUNNING TOWARDS*, hint at a barely audible personal mythology, or perhaps



Ruby Wilkinson, *Cuckoo*, 2024, Oil paint on Belgian linen 75 x 45.1cm

a symbolic set of rules. Listing swimming caps, flags, compromising and the circular motion between noon and midnight, Wilkinson takes her theme for this body of work as things that go round and meet at the top. As opposed to things that go round and meet at the bottom, such as shoes, pools, bowls, nests and hugs, the objects and ideas itemised on Wilkinson's list of things that go round and meet at the top could be conceived as anti-vessels.

Whereas a vessel holds, sits, waits, contains, potentially as part of a self-conscious still life, the anthesis of a vessel is tipped upside down. Nothing can sit quietly in an anti-vessel. But something may flow out of it, a sound may erupt from it, smoke may pour from it, a delicious liquid may stream from it. The bell wakes the town with its clear peals, the crouching chimney spews forth smoke as it protects the hearth below. The tumbled nature of the anti-vessel means that it expels, actively moving us from the interior to the exterior, from containment to the expanse beyond.

Yet this outward capitulation that the anti-vessel enables does not banish the warmth of companionship in *LOVE IS RUNNING TOWARDS*. In the foreground of *Cuckoo* (2024), a string of bells arc across a half-materialised blush-coloured structure. This companionable clutch nestle comfortably with one another. But could these companion bells also be echoes of one another? Fully actualised in a yellow ochre in its first, left-most iteration, this carillon trails off into fainter and fainter outlines as it proceeds to the right of the canvas. Singing from left to right, the outline of the final bells (or bell echoes, as they may be) are tinged with a warm, golden yellow that looks as though it could audibly tinkle. In the receding background, faint pinks and greys emerge, as though seen through mist, or smoke, or the haze of forgetting. In *Cuckoo* the act of recollection is articulated as a sensory, somatic experience; the strain of a bell heard pealing fainter and fainter, the spires of the tower receding beyond the eye's perception.

This somatic element of Wilkinson's paintings may imply that they relate to the body as distinct from the mind. But perhaps we could say that they relate to the mind as part of a sensing body? When thought structures, perceived patterns, and conceptual architectures seem to coalesce with the world around us, we may ask in a moment of confusion *Where does my mind begin? Where do the world*

and matter end? Are they separate? In the paintings of *LOVE IS RUNNING TOWARDS* perhaps they are not.

LOVE IS RUNNING TOWARDS, by Ruby Wilkinson, runs from 24 October to 19 November, 2024, at Ordinance.

The author would like to thank Ruby Wilkinson for generously sharing her research, thinking and workings toward this show.

Skye Malu Baker is an artist and writer currently based in Naarm.

Cover Image: Terracotta Chimneys, Turunç, courtesy Ruby Wilkinson.

1 From Sylvia Plath's 'Morning Song,'; Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*, London: Faber and Faber, 1981, p 156.

2 Elkins, James. *What Painting Is*. New York: Routledge, 1998, p 96-7.