

TED TARGETT

*Writing, painting*

Originally printed as part of 'Stainless', published by Soup Gallery x Foolscape Editions to accompany Anna Clegg's debut solo exhibition.

Anna Clegg's paintings oscillate between quotidian observations of interiors to close-up portraits. Arranged at Soup like a circuitous train of thought, we witness sights from her kitchen and the interior of a gallery, as well as studies of musicians and album covers. But it's in these arbitrary encounters where she traces a deeper meditation about how memories are valued, applying paint like words fixed to the page of a diary.

Clegg is drawn to reading published diaries and auto-fiction, striving for her paintings to emulate their meandering distillations of emotion. She notes 'the societal obsession for nostalgia and youth', pairing images she finds with glimpses of alcoves from her own flat. In *Burning Spear*, Clegg upscales a photograph from 1980 of a youthful, guitar-playing Kai Althoff – the painter who is lauded as a master of our time for his dark, spectral portraits. Clegg accentuates this yearning for recovering the spirits of a past by painting him in umber tones which evoke the palettes of Dutch and Flemish artists from the Golden Age. This distancing and pastiching of context is present across every piece that leaves her studio, Clegg noting that her paintings strive to sit 'somewhere between comedy and tragedy, whilst achieving the intensity of neither'.

As the exhibition subtly reveals itself across both floors, subdued studies merge with more arbitrary ones. Most notably, the austere exterior of a hospital in *Exterior 1* shares the same walls as *Untitled*, an appropriated version of the cover for The Brian Jonestown Massacre's album 'Thank God For Mental Illness', where only the word 'Illness' remains. As writers are told to 'find their voice', Clegg continually seeks to lead hers astray, each painting like a comma or full stop in a longer sentence told over a lifetime. Her painting style meanders, sometimes her subjects demanding hard definition while others are left gauzy and diaphanous. In her studies of interiors, their initial appearance as photographs subsides into a more obfuscated reading. Painter Gerhard Richter wrote that 'I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant': Clegg does this too, in similarly cryptic ways. The interiors come in and out of view, Clegg likening the effect to the wavering still of a VHS tape on pause.

Like memories which alter when they're retold, her paintings are similarly hazy in atmosphere – darkened corners highlit from an eerie eye-level height. In *Interior 5*, she paints the East London gallery Project Native Informant from a skewed angle, painting the view from inside looking out and omitting the artworks entirely. Clegg notes of being drawn to 'lonely and depressive' sights, as she brings attention to subtle ambiguities of everyday existence. Although detailed in their accuracy, Clegg's paintings leave us in a state of limbo, their awkward unbalanced aperture rendering them both uncannily familiar, yet also unknown.