

Exhibition text by Alice Chasey

'Empty chairs – there are many, more will come.'

Vincent van Gogh ¹

Jason Line's paintings predominately feature still lifes – collections of objects arranged on shelves and window sills; wooden chairs placed just so. These objects are not randomly positioned but carefully, even meticulously arranged, the spaces between them just as important as the pieces themselves. The dialogue between each shape, the silent conversations they share, is of utmost importance.

'The chair with its back, seat, arms, legs and feet resembles possibly the nearest inanimate object to a human being and can exude a powerful presence in the right light as well providing a wealth of pictorial possibilities.'²

Furniture – chairs and tables, are placed by the artist like props for a play. They are set at precise angles, in conference with each other, working in pairs, and passing secrets between them. They are the inanimate characters in these paintings, following an unseen script. What's not said is almost as important as what's said in this work. It is the gaps between objects, in spaces, that matter here. Empty chairs and empty rooms are left blank for our own interpretation.

Take for example, *Two Chairs Against the Light* 2023 in which the chairs look like they have been left to hold their own conversation while their occupants have perhaps just got up and walked away. What secrets do they hold as they lean towards each other? What intimacies shared? How much have their borne witness to? Like props on a stage, they wait to be brought to life by their human inhabitants.

The interior of the room each object inhabits – be they pots, vases, bowls or chairs – is also key. The walls, the floor, the grid like windows, all have their own story to tell. Space is key to Jason's practice, whether this is space measured between the individual elements depicted on a plinth or the wider domestic space that comes into focus when the camera pans out.

Unlike for example, the domestic interiors of Johannes Vermeer, the figure isn't central here, the spaces are mostly empty. As we know from Van Gogh who painted empty chairs and empty rooms as a repeated motif, 'Throughout art history the empty chair is often associated with absence, loss or a stand-in for a particular person'³. The only human presence in Jason's works are self portraits, the artist appearing in reflections and

shadows, almost ghost like. Indeed, shadows are everywhere – they fall from vases, cups, and bowls.

In *Studio at Night 2022* a white Lloyd Loom chair with a blush pink cushion, is echoed in the pink book placed on the window sill. The figure of the artist can just be made out in reflection in the bottom left pane of glass, a shadowy presence who becomes almost abstract as he stands painting at the easel. In *Studio Interior with Yellow Chair and Mirror 2023*, he is there again, a mirror image, a dark liminal figure.

There are reflections to be found everywhere in Jason's work: in window panes, in mirrors, in the glass bottles and vases arranged on a shelf, in a small glass of water. They are in the open windows of the studio setting, vast panes of glass providing a natural light source, to spotlight and highlight the objects in the room. There is mystery here. There is quiet and stillness. But any melancholy is shot through with pops of colour. Pinks, greens, and the ubiquitous yellow chair who becomes a character in his own right, the lead character of this exhibition, one might say.

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Notes

1 Quoted in Carol Jacobi ed., *Van Gogh in Britain*, exh.cat, Tate 2019, p.91.

2 Jason Line, 2023.

3 Ibid.

Setting the Scene | Jason Line
An Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings
14 - 29 APRIL 2023

ABOUT THE GALLERY

155A Gallery, established in 2018 by Karen Smith, specialises in showcasing contemporary art through themed exhibitions drawn from emerging and established artists, both from the UK and across the world. Curation is driven by similarities in approach to material, leading to a focus on the formal elements of artistic practice.

155A Gallery

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