

LISMORE CASTLE ARTS

# NATASHA PIKE

2 NOVEMBER -  
20 DECEMBER 2020

GRADUATE AWARD  
EXHIBITION



Recipient of the 2020 LCA graduate award. With  
commissioned text by Ciara Healy-Musson.

*and almost I am  
back again*

Natasha Pike  
*And Almost I am Back Again*

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2 November -  
20 December  
[www.lismorecastlearts.ie](http://www.lismorecastlearts.ie)

# Introduction

## Natasha Pike

### *And Almost I am Back Again*

Viewable online from 1 November, 2020.

[www.lismorecastlearts.ie](http://www.lismorecastlearts.ie)

Lismore Castle Arts is delighted to present a solo exhibition by Natasha Pike, recipient of our 2020 graduate award.

Moving to an online award for 2020, the exhibition presents a new body of work by Natasha Pike, graduate of the 2019 Crawford College of Art MA Programme.

Natasha Pike's paintings and sculptures blur the boundaries of each other – paintings sweep off the wall, almost eager to reach the sculpture on the floor below, canvasses are often unstretched, their torn edges keeping their own physical boundaries in flux. The sculptures are different shapes, some strict rectangular shapes, others rough acorn like shapes, cut clinically in half, colours soft as sherbet reflected in the minimal tones of the paintings above. It is a conversation between themselves, so successfully here it is as if the artist is no longer in charge, and the works are now leading a private interplay.

Words are important to Natasha, in earlier works written across the painted surfaces in distant reference to Basquiat or Twombly, but in more recent work disappearing off the surface and resting in the titles alone. *And Almost I am Back Again*, *Sad Ring*, *Pink Pond* *Milk Pond* are humorous references to the everyday, hinting at the multitude of references, ideas, notes and observations which inform an artist's thinking, to finally rest in the considered, reductive work on display here. The titles act as a poetic framework for the physicality of the works to seek meaning in one another.

Natasha Pike is an Irish artist with an MA in Art & Process from Crawford College of Art and Design, IRL (2019), a BA in Fine Art from Falmouth University, UK (2007) and a Foundation Diploma from Manchester Metropolitan, UK (2002). With residencies at The Cill Rialaig Project and The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Ireland, as well as in Barcelona, Buenos Aires and Berlin (assisted by the Irish Arts Council Travel and Training award 2014), Natasha worked in Berlin for several years before returning to base herself in Ireland, working in abstract painting, made object, and drawing.







# Ciara Healy-Musson

## *One doesn't stir without the other.*

In post WWII America and Europe, artists like Alberto Burri, Robert Rauschenberg and Lynda Benglis expanded the field of painting, to include objects and materials other than canvas on a frame. Their work, and the work of their peers at the time, began a conversation about painting, it's boundaries and frameworks, that has never really ended.

In the ensuing decades, this conversation continued to include new interdisciplinary approaches. Painters became artists, where paint was not necessarily their sole medium. The paradigms around painting that have emerged since Rauschenberg's time, have become an inherent part of art school education in most western countries. They have been absorbed, discussed and digested by students for a number of years.

Today, they form part of a wider conversation about the distinction between a surface and the environment that surrounds it; about how materials combined or composed in a certain way can create visual music; about how objects, painted or otherwise, are understood to have their own agency.

Philosophically, this wider conversation is often referred to as *new materialism*, *object-oriented theory* or, sometimes, as *flat ontology*. Put very simply, these philosophies reject the notion that one entity (e.g. the subject, or human world) should be privileged over others (e.g. objects, technologies, animals, environments etc). Certainly, humans have unique powers and capacities, yet new materialists argue that nothing about their powers should establish that they must be included in every inter-object relation. Rather than treating nonhuman entities as passive matter upon which humans project their intentions and meanings, new materialists believe that everything which makes up the non-human world is a genuine actor in its own right<sup>1</sup>.

The actors that make up Natasha Pike's exhibition *And Almost I am Back Again* at St Carthage Hall, Lismore are made of concrete, Portland stone, pigment, silicone, latex, cardboard and wood. In the sunlight from the stained-glass windows of the former chapel, they appear very much alive, with their own needs, complexities, vulnerabilities and presence in this special space.

*Sad ring*, is a bright pink circle, formed of air-drying clay, imbued with the touch of the artists hand. Measuring 120 centimetres in diameter, it hangs on the back of the gallery wall without any kind of metal armature to support it. The thinly scrunched up clay takes the form of the inside of the artists grasping hands. Each hand is connected to another echo of a hand grasping beside it. Their union is what makes the structure strong. Each individual part of this piece then, is reliant on another, distinct from it, but inescapably always a part of it.

1

Some important 20th and 21st century thinkers that pay careful attention to nonhuman agencies include Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Deleuze and Guattari, Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, ecologists like Timothy Morton and critical animal theorists such as Cary Wolfe



The idea of agency, union, harmony and, in some ways, responsibility, is echoed in *To a God Unknown III*. Two small pieces of cast concrete, both the same size as each other, sit one on top of the other. The top half is made of Portland cement tinted pink, the bottom half is made of grey cement. Both have been crafted to bear scratches and marks on their surface from what looks like crumpled up paper or corrugated cardboard which was once held in the artists hands. These slightly bashed objects, which appear time worn and tired are sensitively and considerably displayed. On the plywood shelf, which was made to support them, Pike created a little dip in the wood. This allows the object to be more comfortable, to sit with ease in a crevice that offers rest. This prompts consideration of how we ourselves respond to each other and the often bruised and beaten inhabitants of the living world. This is especially poignant given the catastrophes that continue to unfold around us this year.

Comfort and support are given to other, primarily industrial objects in the gallery, like concrete and steel through the use of materials like wadding, cardboard, chiffon and carved wood. *Milk Pond Pink Pond*, made from cast grey and pink tinged Portland concrete in the middle of the gallery also has a cushion of cardboard gently supporting it from the cold grey floor.

*Soul Hole*, an assemblage floor piece made of latex with Portland cement, silicone and a soft circle of wadding makes references to the belly button, often regarded as being the doorway into the world of the senses. This ‘node and focus of the world’ as described by Australian poet and environmentalist Judith Wright is the one mark on our bodies which tells us that we once inhabited another world (our mothers), which she describes as ‘the stem that fed the fruit.’<sup>2</sup> We left this world behind to inhabit another world, the one of light. But our soul hole is the link that ‘joins [us] to the night’.

Deviating from the stillness, warmth and contemplative nature of her sculptural works, Pike’s paintings have a more direct sense of fizzing urgency. *To a God Unknown I*, a candyfloss pink and white painting hung in portrait format on the far wall of the gallery space, where once an altar would have been, is positively humming.

The work is painted on to primed linen, stretched on to a wooden frame. Both this painting and *I wish we were free radicals (pink) & (yellow)* are painted on the same type of surface. The canvases themselves had been given to Pike by someone who had received them from someone else. Over the years, the white prime paint yellowed, and it is this surface and its long journey of catching the light or lying in a store cupboard unused, that gives the paintings their luminosity. Pike was careful not to paint the edges of the frame, so we can see that journey marked out in stains and lines, little tears and frays here and there and, occasionally, a sagging in the linen, where old staples had given way.

In between *I wish we were free radicals (pink) & (yellow)* is another canvas, titled *Two-part Peter* which had also been on a journey. This time to Berlin and back. Beneath the smudged clouds of white, lies another earlier painting by the artist. The black painted corners lapping at the edges of the frame are the only indication that beneath this image there is another, which once lived somewhere else in another time.

Like a palimpsest, Pike layers the past and the present into many of her artworks. Several kinds of time operate in parallel: the painted mark on canvas which already bears the marks of other times and other presences, the felt impression on clay or concrete - all show the extent to which we are involved with, and encounter, material surfaces from the moment we are born. From the surface





of other people's skin, to the surface of the material world in all its forms, we are perpetually engaged with marking time on surfaces, and those surfaces in turn, mark time on us.

*If you want to know why you cannot reach your own beautiful ideas* is a large canvas that has unravelled or broken free from its frame. The raw cotton canvas at the bottom, skims the floor and has been pulled loose from its wooden structure. There is a tension in this work because the painting itself is a depiction of a frame, a thick black square painted on to a semi primed surface. The collapsing of canvas on to the floor is as if the painting has rejected the rigidity of its own existence. As with all creative endeavours, it often happens that the poem, the song, the painting or the dance can say much more than the tight intellectual boundaries we might try to pin it into. *If you want to know why you cannot reach your own beautiful ideas* is gloriously coming undone, slipping the anchor of the reality it has been confined to inhabit, to become something else.

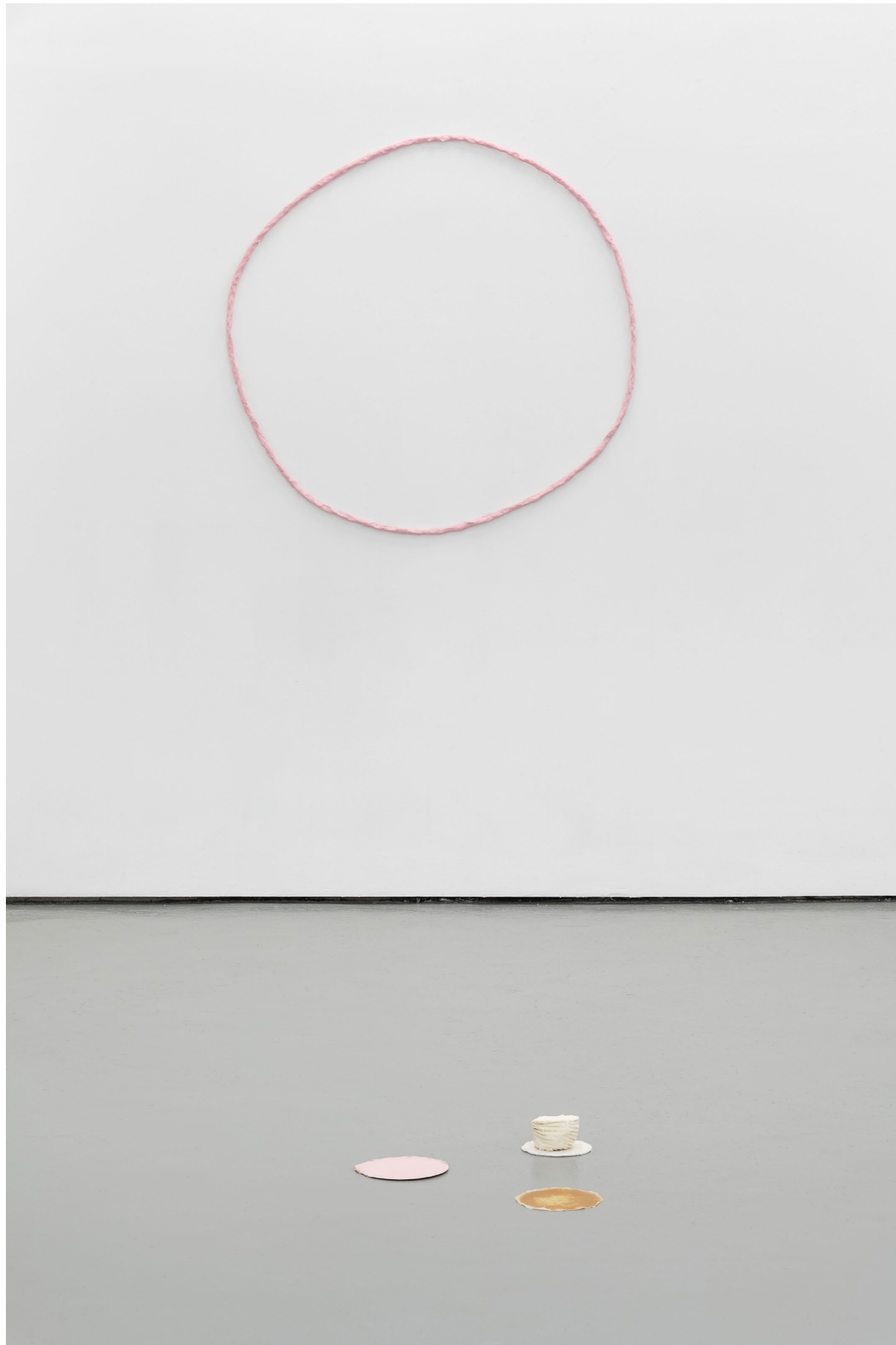
The core notions of becoming, co-existence, of material sentience and agency are explored repeatedly in each constellation of works. In this regard, Pike's visual language is spoken not just with one authoritarian artists voice, but with the many voices of the materials with which she co-creates.

Pike lived in Berlin for a number of years and returned to Ireland in 2016. She revisited the city for a residency in 2018, at a time when the Irish government was under increasing pressure to repeal the Eighth Amendment; an Irish law which made the act of abortion, where there was no immediate physiological threat to the woman's life, a criminal offence punishable by life imprisonment.

Whilst Pike's work didn't respond directly to this moment in time, it was the point in which her practice became more overtly concerned with expressing the need to take responsibility for each other. The challenge then, so familiar to many artists, became about how to respond to the world in which we live, in a way that is neither illustrative, literal or didactic. It was at this point in her career that Pike decided to strip everything back, to think about composition, colour and the edges of things. To pay attention to, and be present in, the act of making, so as to discover what materials themselves had to say. Far from being passive matter awaiting formatting by her hands, Pike found, to her surprise, that all materials have their own story.

In this exhibition, everything claims its own agency and performs together, becoming harmonious. Pike's work, therefore, is about being profoundly present and attentive to the world of the senses, to materials and their being. When we consider these relationships, we might experience what ecologist David Abram calls a "felt relation with other forms of sentience."<sup>3</sup>

The space and the light in St Carthage Hall, adds to this. It is difficult not to see something of the sacred or the numinous in the positioning of the works. Pike is aware of these references, and the bodily need to make and connect with symbolic archetypes. The work has, what the critical theorist Jane Bennet might call, a vital force, suggesting that there is something there, outside of ourselves. Pike is not necessarily concerned with what exactly that something might be called (e.g. God, Nature, the Divine). She is more interested in doing justice to these strange nonhuman actors, respecting these strange strangers on their own terms, which, in a broader political and social context becomes absolutely vital to our shared future.



We are no longer at the centre of being but are among beings. We are called to be *with* the objects in the exhibition, so that we may come to know the material vitality we share with them. This sense of strange commonality risks what Jane Bennett calls ‘the taint of superstition; animism, vitalism, of anthropomorphism and other premodern attitudes’<sup>4</sup>

It is a philosophy that builds a discourse around plurality and simultaneity, giving agency to organic and inorganic things. It gives us the ability to ascertain some, if not all, of the potentials that relational interactions can bring about. Not all of the objects contribute equally, but they do all equally exist.

*And Almost I am Back Again* transforms St Carthage Hall into a place to dwell attentively, with, and in, the moment. The work asks us to stay, as the scientist Donna Haraway once proposed, ‘with the trouble’<sup>5</sup>. It is an invitation to linger on the threshold of this world, and its vibrant, pulsating, material and, sometimes numinous, counterpart.

Ciara Healy-Musson  
October 2020

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4 Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press. P. 18

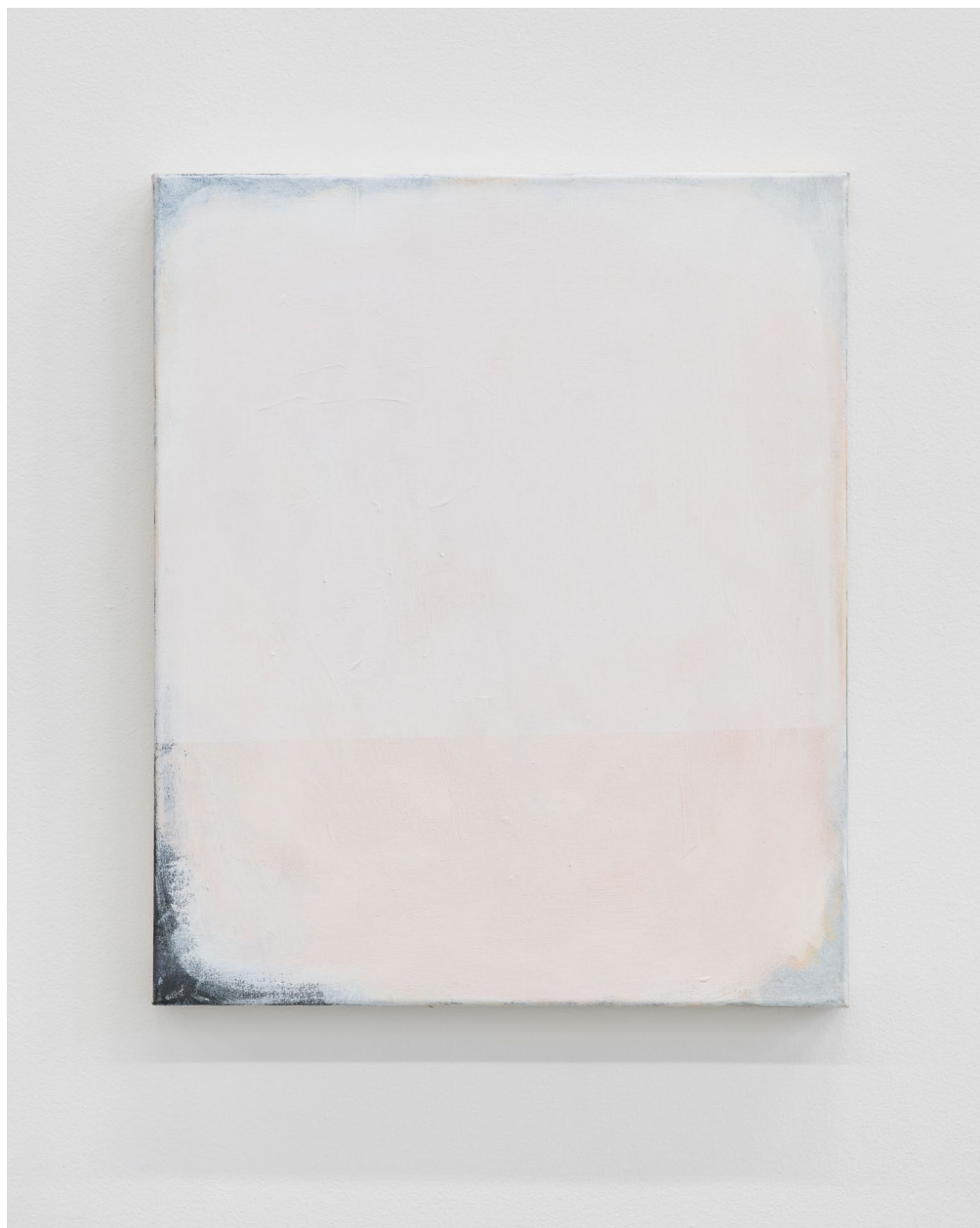
5 Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press. P. 5













# With thanks to

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# Works in the exhibition



*Soul Holes*, silicone rubber, latex, wadding, portland cement, sand and yellow pigment, approx. 18cm diameter and 15cm by 8cm.



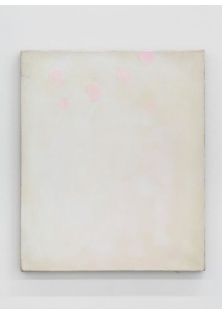
*If you want to know why you cannot reach your own beautiful ideas*, Acrylic on canvas, 130cm by 260cm approx.



*Milk Pond Pink Pond*, Portland cement, white sand, pigment, cement & cardboard, 60cm by 40cm by 20cm



*Untold hierarchies*, Portland cement, white sand, pigment, cement, 40cm by 30cm by 20cm each.



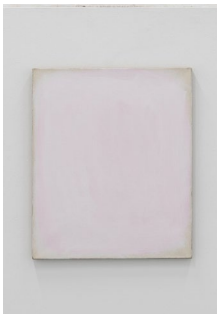
*I wish we were free radicals (pink)*, Acrylic on linen, 50cm by 60cm



*Sad ring*, Air drying clay and pigment, 120cm diameter approx.



*Two-part Peter*, Acrylic on canvas, 50cm by 60cm



*To a God Unknown I*, Acrylic on linen, 50cm by 60cm



*To a God Unknown III*, Portland cement, pigment, cement, plywood shelf with steel bar, 18cm by 14cm by 18cm



*SPIRITLEVEL II*, Chiffon, interface and steel bar, 12cm by 12cm by 150cm



*I wish we were free radicals (yellow)*, Acrylic on linen, 50cm by 60cm

