

Dexter Dalwood *London Paintings**Simon Lee Gallery, London 18 November – 24 January*

Dexter Dalwood earned his reputation at the end of the 1990s by painting the imagined homes and offices of celebrities. His works were fun and likeable, but his association with Charles Saatchi and Martin Maloney has been hard to shake off. Nonetheless, Dalwood's first show at Simon Lee, signalling a move from Gagosian Gallery (five years after his last show with them), sees him ditch completely the explicit references to celebrities to continue the more earnest and politically conscious mood of his paintings since the mid-2000s, here focusing on the gritty charms of his hometown of London.

This isn't the London of chichi coffee shops. Although the paintings – a mix of anonymous interiors and iconic landmarks – are dated 2013 and 2014, they seem nostalgic for a time when the city was rougher around the edges. There are two scenes from cult music venues, both still riding today on their legendary reputations. *Roundhouse* (2014), zooming in on a corner of a stage set, as if we were pushed up against it during a gig, is bathed in blood-red tones; *Heaven* (2013) depicts the exit corridor of the famous nightclub, looking into the black void of the club interior dotted with indeterminate whitish streaks – maybe people, maybe disco lights. The peculiar angles and

hallucinatory vibe suggests fragments from hazy personal memories.

Four paintings depicting details of domestic interiors in different parts of the capital underscore the transient nature of bohemian London living. The evocative addresses of their titles hint at the greater cultural history of the city. Powis Square in Notting Hill, for example, was made famous as the set of the cult 1970 film *Performance*. In Dalwood's *Powis Square* (2014), there is a suggestion of a figure at the bottom of the lofty room; a Francis Baconesque play on cropping, volume and psychological intrigue. It's the only clear sign of life in any of these interiors; elsewhere, our imagination and memories must fill in the human element.

Dalwood has previously assumed the role of obsessed celebrity fan, and here he continues the game of asking us to spot pop-cultural and art-historical references that appear sometimes as quotes, at other times as familiar painting techniques or moods. London's history of painters merges here with London itself. He is clearly attracted to British Pop, as represented by the likes of Patrick Caulfield and David Hockney; also the dark, psychologically charged works of Whistler and Bacon. Two Thames scenes, *Old Thames* and *The Thames Below Waterloo* (both 2014),

recall Whistler's London nocturnes and Monet's paintings of Waterloo Bridge respectively, while in the latter a patch of LA-swimming-pool-blue water – complete with the top of a pool ladder – unexpectedly references Hockney.

The mix of memory and art history means that the works defy pinning down to a particular time. *1989* (2014), the back end of the horse from the George IV statue on Trafalgar Square, is the only painting for which we are given a specific historical date to consider. The year 1989 is when the Poll Tax riots took place on Trafalgar Square, effectively marking the end of Thatcherism and a brief moment of victory for Londoners against an unwanted government policy. In Dalwood's cheeky version (he first depicted the Poll Tax protests in a 2005 painting), the horse looks a little too realistic, as if it might walk off the plinth or dump some steaming manure. It's these sparks of unexpected references, disjointed elements and punky humour that add interest to Dalwood's superficially simple work. If his celebrity interiors were always more concerned with his – and indeed our own – fantasies than with the famous people themselves, this portrait of London gives us insight into Dalwood's influences and youthful nostalgias. *Jennifer Thatcher*



Roundhouse, 2014, oil on canvas, 150 × 220 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London