

# HIDDE VAN SEGGELEN GALLERY

## PRESS RELEASE MELANIE CARVALHO

23 May-19 June 2010

Private View Saturday 22 May 3-7 PM

Of course we all know the drill; the conventions of landscape painting developed in Europe over the last six centuries are now so familiar to us that it is sometimes hard not to see the world framed by horizontally orientated rectangles ('landscape format', as Page Setup will tell you – and also the natural orientation of the camera viewfinder). These conventions mostly serve to codify great expanses of space, depth and distance in two dimensions: the arrangement of a detailed tree or piece of foliage in the foreground, perhaps some human or animal activity in the middle ground then a broad horizon stretching beneath an imposing sky.



For Melanie Carvalho depth is not just an illusory strategy, but of psychological significance too. Caves, passages, reflections, faraway horizons and receding, repeating ornamental patterns have all featured in her recent work. Each device is meant as a challenge, and as an invitation. These are places in which to drift or to get lost, and an inky black cave is as much a path to psychically inhabit these spaces as it is a warning to keep away.

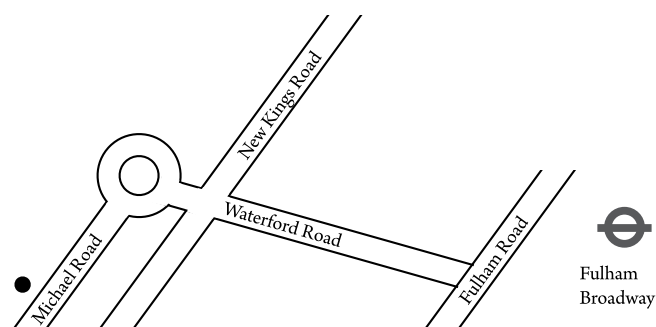
Carvalho's paintings don't solely try to represent landscapes however; they are landscapes. By taking direction from the restless reservoirs, estuaries and accretions of the paint, Carvalho maps her own micro-terrains, in which the processes of erosion, flow, fracture and fission combine with the drifts and journeys of the mind. Thin washes of paint, soaking through and staining the canvas in a way that for Modernists such as Morris Louis was synonymous with flatness, are here commensurable with inky depths through which we can imagine ourselves sinking.

But where is Carvalho inviting us to journey in her images? These landscapes are not, as one might at first imagine, neutral wildernesses for us to claim as our own. One would ar-

gue that Carvalho's work is emphatically about possession; it is about the artist colonising and occupying space, and making it a part of herself, through representation. To greater or lesser extents, Carvalho inscribes her own body onto the spaces she depicts, as (mostly male, mostly white) artists have done for centuries. The difference with her sometimes hazy, sometimes murky, always sensual and liquescent landscapes is one partly based in gender. Ethnicity too plays a part: in an earlier body of work she travelled through the west coast of Scotland in search of subtropical vegetation growing there as a result of the Gulf Stream, trying to find how a young woman of partly Indian descent might find a place in this landscape. While these paintings may function as portals of sorts, wormholes that allow us to pass from one dimension into another we can never ignore the presence of the artist, hovering like a spirit guide beside us. *Text Jonathan Griffin 2009/2010.*

Melanie Carvalho's latest paintings draw on the English visionary tradition of Samuel Palmer and William Blake. Both artists sought to depict nature in 'a state of poetic rapture'. Carvalho employs a 'new age' palette, combined with techniques such as auto-painting, doodling and collage, to make contemporary this metaphysical understanding of the world.

Carvalho lives and works in Peckham, south London. This is her second show with Hidde van Seggelen, and the opening exhibition of the gallery. Previous shows include East International 2007, Where the Wild Things Are at Dundee Contemporary Arts, Collage at Bloomberg Space, Viewfinder at Arnolfini, Bristol, and Describe a Landscape at Cubitt, London. Her work is in many private collections, and in the New Art Gallery Walsall public collection.



Hidde van Seggelen Gallery  
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Open | Wed – Sat 12 - 6 PM and by appointment