

P R E S S R E L E A S E

JULIAN COOPER

LINES OF DESCENT

New paintings

17 March – 28 April 2023

The 48 page exhibition catalogue
featuring essays by
Robert Macfarlane and **Stephen Goodwin**

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Deep Pool 1, oil on canvas, 214 x 132 cm

A wild swimmer, diminutive against a brooding mountainside, a fell farmer bottle-feeding a calf, memory traces of mine tracks and old stone walls through moor and mire... The large canvases of **Julian Cooper** that comprise this *Lines of Descent* exhibition are both visually arresting and psychologically unsettling. The Lake District's pre-eminent painter, **Cooper** challenges our perceptions of Britain's uplands, a landscape contingent on forces of not only raw nature but those of economics and public prejudices.

Cooper has exhibited in London at the Art Space Gallery since 1998, accruing over the years a body of work that wholly reinterprets notions of landscape painting, and particularly that of mountains and remote terrain. Over more than four decades he has hiked and painted in the Alps, Andes, Tasmania and Himalaya, establishing a reputation for powerful canvases that draw in the viewer ever deeper, eroding conceits of human primacy.

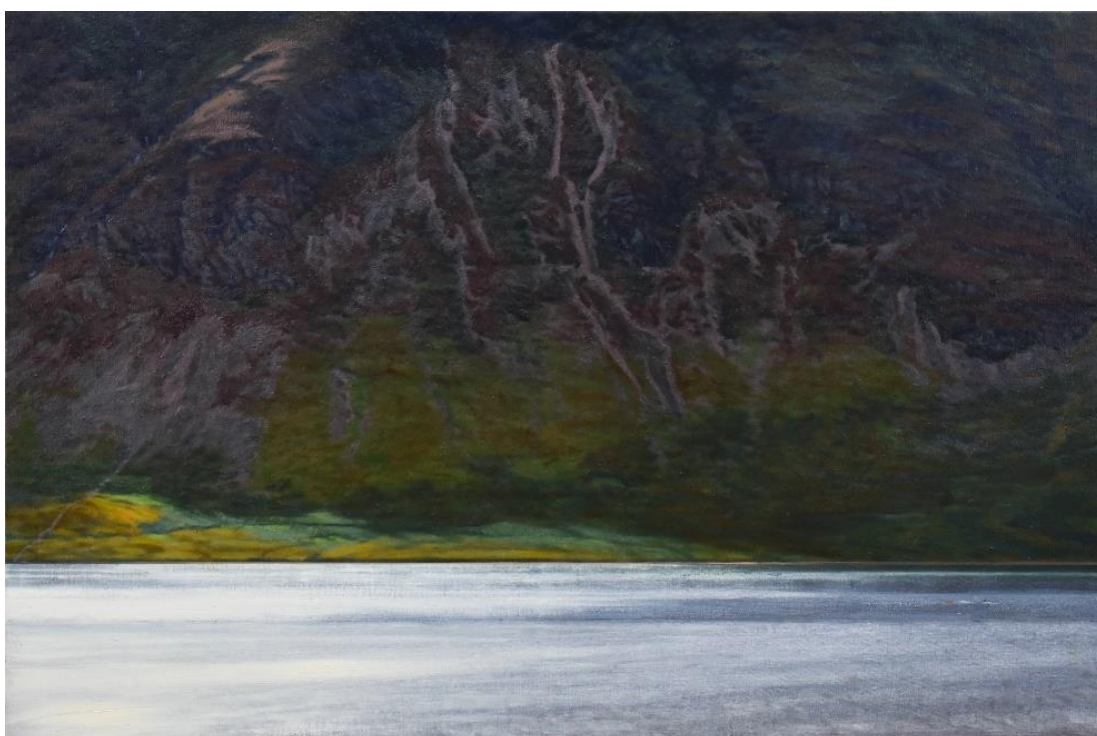
The paintings in this latest collection all have their genesis within a 20-mile radius of Cooper's home in Cockermouth - partly a reflection of Covid travel restrictions and a growing distaste for long haul flights, but borne more of a restless desire to get under the skin of his native heath, to understand the forces, non-human and human, at play in these northern fells.

The 'lines of descent' of the title are predominantly those of cascading becks, fans of scree, and of incised gullies, carving fell-sides as textured and multi-shaded as a fine old carpet; the effect is almost abstract. But there is also the 'descent' of young girl diving into a pool - a 'pot' - in a fast-flowing beck. Viewing from beneath the surface, Cooper creates a unity between three contrasting

elements - the fissured rock walls of the pool, the hurrying water, and the girl, who we know must surface for air, yet in the moment seems as naturally at home as a selkie.

That sense of co-existence permeates much of this new work. Swimmer and climber leave little visual trace though their impact in the valley as visiting tourists might well; just one of the questions lurking like cloud shadow in these paintings. Farming most obviously does, from fell-sides grazed barren by sheep to walls and wire fences.

Cooper does not shy from the 'workplace-heritage park' contradictions of the Lake District. As a 'Laker' born and bred he has an affinity with the families who have made a living on these hard hills. Both he and they are hefted to this place by generational 'lines of descent'. In one large canvas displayed at Art Space, a farmer is seated on a quad-bike while bottle-feeding a calf; looming menacingly over this tender act is a huge cliff, depicted in all its geological complexity. It is a scene both timeless and thoroughly modern; and one that stands testament to Julian Cooper's rare ability to embody landscape painting with penetrating commentary.



Across the Lake, oil on canvas, 92 x 138 cm

Julian Cooper studied at Lancaster School of Art (1964-65), Goldsmiths' College of Art (1965) and in 1969 was awarded the Boise Travelling Scholarship and was resident at the British School in Rome (1994-95). He has work in public and private collections worldwide, has exhibited regularly in London at Art Space Gallery. His work featured in *A Picture of Britain* at Tate (2005) and he has had major retrospective exhibitions at Museo Nazionale Della Montagna, Turin (2005) and Abbot Hall, in Kendal (2017). This will be his eighth solo exhibition at Art Space Gallery.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm
