

Nicola Bealing

Chapter 1: Dead-man's Fingers

1 February–5 March 2023, Wed–Sun, 12–6pm
Private View 29 January 2023, 2–5pm

Chapter 2: The Borough

12 March–16 April 2023, Wed–Sun, 12–6pm

Matt's Gallery is pleased to announce a new exhibition in two parts by Nicola Bealing. Drawing from two connected new bodies of work: Chapter 1 will present works from *Dead-man's Fingers* and Chapter 2, *The Borough*.

Dead-man's Fingers is a body of work made during lockdown when total immersion in an alien world seemed a logical response to darkness beyond the studio door. The works developed into an intense investigation of heightened, imagined sub-marine landscapes. The maritime environment is seen as a place of threat. This darkness forms the perfect accompaniment to the Gothic horror explored in *Chapter 2: The Borough*.

The series comprises paintings and a series of newly developed 3D works which take their macabre title from the common name of a coral - *Alcyonium digitatum*. The works immediately precede *The Borough* and are linked through their depiction, investigation and study of fictionalised underwater worlds which drift between beauty and menace.

Apart from a few scattered teeth and finger-bones, there is little human presence in these still and strange paintings. They are quiet images of sub-marinescapes which revel in the act of painting. Colour is heightened, controlled elements contrast with the random outcomes of Rorschach blots and scrapes.

After storms, lost, battered boat fenders, buoys and crab-pot markers wash up along the coast - links between natural & man-made elements in the sea, but also the detritus and jetsam of other people's lives. These inherently sculptural objects became the basis for suspended constructions. These sculptures grew slowly - clustering & spreading across the studio like an inverted reef.

The sculptural elements of *Dead-man's Fingers* developed after the paintings, as if growing out of them like eerie 3-dimensional embodiments. They echo a vertiginous effect of submersion, a feeling of being below the surface & looking up.

Nicola Bealing (b. 1963, Hertford) studied at Hertfordshire College of Art and the Byam Shaw School of Art, London. Lives and works in Cornwall.

Selected solo exhibitions:
Salisbury Arts Centre, 2020; Foundling Museum, London, 2019; Kestle Barton, Helston, 2019; Matt's Gallery, London, 2018; Tremeneheere Sculpture Garden, Cornwall, 2017; Kestle Barton, Cornwall, 2016; Cadogan Contemporary, London, 2014; Danneskiold-Samsøe Gallery, Copenhagen, 2013; Beaux Arts Gallery, Bath, 2011; Cadogan Contemporary, London, 2011; Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden, 2010; Beaux Arts Gallery, Bath, 2009; Cadogan Contemporary, London, 2009; Wagner and Schortgen Fine Art, Luxembourg, 1998; The Oxford Gallery, Oxford, 1997; The Montpelier Gallery, London, 1994; Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth, 1993; Christie's Education, London, 1991.

Selected group exhibitions:
Bridge the Tamar, Mirror, Plymouth, 2023; Dowch i Brestatyn Heulog (Come to Sunny Prestatyn) Arcade Campfa, Cardiff, 2022; A Modern Caprichio, Cross Lane Projects /Vestry Street, London, 2022; Head to Head, GBS Fine Art, Wells, 2022; Like There is Hope and I Can Dream of Another World, Hospital Rooms/Hauser & Wirth Auction, London, 2022; Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London, 2022; Love, Celebration and the Road Ahead, Hettie Judah/TJ Boulting, London, 2022; Insects, Books and the Artistic Imagination, Salisbury Museum, 2022; Bodies in Space, Mirror, Plymouth, 2021; John Moores Painting Prize, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 2021; Mariner, The Edge/Andrew Brownsword Gallery, Bath 2020; Chicken Nuggets, Pool School Gallery, Cornwall, 2020; Bugs - Beauty and Danger, Groundwork Gallery, King's Lynn, Norfolk, 2020; Hospital Rooms Auction, Hauser and Wirth, London, 2020; Box of Delights, The Bower, London, 2019; Mariner, Levinsky Gallery, The Arts Institute, Plymouth, 2019; Body and Soul, RWA, Bristol, 2019; Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London, 2019; The Art of Rivalry, OSR Projects, Somerset, 2018; Show Women, Jerwood & Ingram Collections, Gibberd Gallery, Essex, 2018; Where it is, there it is, Auction House Project Space, Redruth, Cornwall, 2018; Perspective, Petronilla Silver, London, 2018;

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The Borough is a suite of new paintings by Bealing, completed with the support of The Bryan Robertson Award, which Bealing won in 2021. The series takes its title from George Crabbe's long poem of the same name. Published in 1810, it describes the inhabitants & institutions of a fictional coastal village through a series of letters.

Letter no. XXII is the disturbing account of Peter Grimes, a fisherman who takes on a series of young apprentices who one by one meet grisly ends at his hands. It is from here that Bealing has departed on this series of works. (Benjamin Britten famously used this same source material as the basis of his opera *Peter Grimes* in 1945).

Grimes' story is a truly horrible one; a nasty litany of brutality, misery, child abuse, serial murder and mental collapse, but for Bealing this darkness pulses with imagery. As Crabbe's human tragedy plays out against the maritime environment rich visions bubble up.

The dark heart of the tale is that the people of the Borough are absolutely aware of Grimes' cruelty, neglect, bullying, abuse and eventual murder of his apprentice boys, but turn a communal blind eye doing nothing beyond mild tut-tutting. Crabbe writes, '.... some, on hearing cries/Said calmly, "Grimes is at his exercise."'

It is assumed that Crabbe based the character of Peter Grimes on a real person. The story of society failing the vulnerable and pouring out remorse when it's too late is old and familiar and all the more chilling as a result.

Alongside a series of her signature small character studies, *The Borough* includes Bealing's largest individual works to date: *Again They Come* and *Lost Hope and Anchor*, each measuring 3 metres in height. Bealing felt it was important that these paintings take on a towering presence through their monumental size.

Typical of Bealing's work we find a push/pull effect in the paintings - the viewer is drawn in by colour and seductive paint work but then repulsed and slapped back by the imagery and subject matter. This is especially relevant in this body of work where the source material is such a fundamentally shocking account, when the distancing effects of time and fictionalisation are stripped away.

Lost for Words, The Project Space, Falmouth University, Cornwall, 2016; Strange Worlds: The Visions of Angela Carter, RWA, Bristol, 2016; The Columbia Threadneedle Prize, London & Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2016; The White Hotel, Gimpel Fils, London; The Jerwood Collection Revealed, Jerwood Gallery, Hastings, 2014; Works on Paper, Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden, 2014; The Threadneedle Prize for Painting and Sculpture, Mall Galleries, London, 2013; Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue? Flowers Gallery, London, 2013; First Eleven, CAST, Helston, Cornwall, 2013; The Jerwood Contemporary Collection, Jerwood Gallery, Hastings, 2012; Contemporary Cornish Painting, IMS Exhibition, Falmouth Art Gallery and Christie's, London, 2012; The Discerning Eye, Mall Galleries, London, 2011; Wills Lane Gallery, Cornwall, 2011; Print!, The Exchange, Penzance, 2011; The Drawing Show, curated by The Drawing Room, London, The Exchange Gallery, Penzance, 2008; Recent Acquisitions, Unilever House, London, 1994; Peninsular Journeys, Coventry and Middlesex University Art Galleries, 1993.