

EXHIBITIONS

HUON MALLALIEU

AFTER THE FLOOD

Art Space Gallery, London N1,
5th September to 17th October

The title of this show is a statement of fact.

A couple of months ago, the gallery in St Peter's Street, Islington, was flooded, thanks in part to Thames Water's antiquated pipes. They had not been fully upgraded, despite the devastating December 2016 flood in nearby Camden Passage.

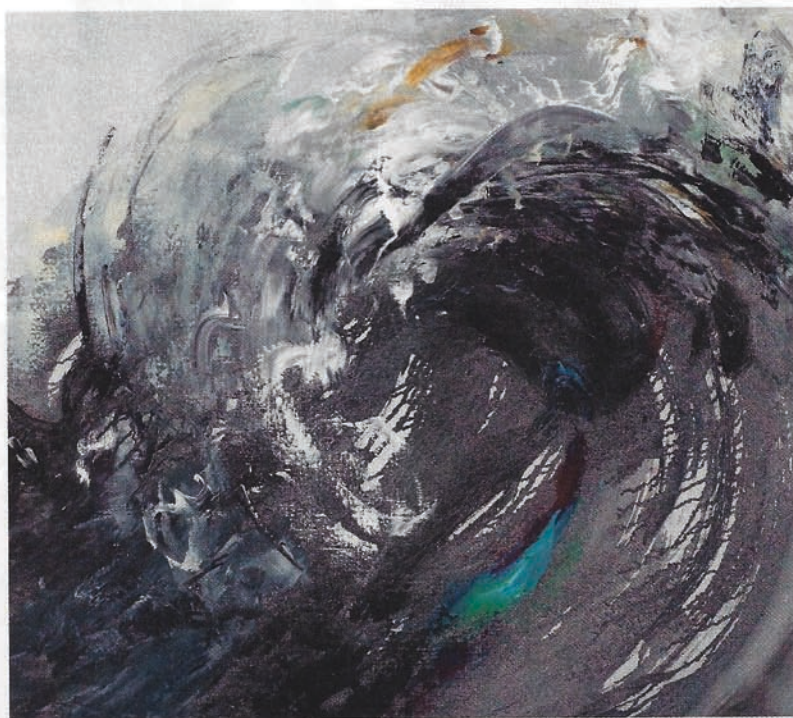
The latest burst meant that Art Space's exhibition programme had to be rapidly rearranged. The show is made up of new or recent work, fitting the obvious theme of water, by five gallery artists with one distinguished extra, Maggi Hambling.

Art Space, run by Michael and Oya Richardson, is one of many around the country that steer a middle way between the expensively modernist and the worthy traditional.

That Manichaean division, dating back to the revolution in European art in the first two decades of the 20th century, no longer rules the market. There is a great deal more tolerance between schools and styles, not everything has to be 'challenging', and painting and drawing have come back from near extinction.

Even land and seascapes are not derided now, and these six artists are all painters of land and sea, among other things. Maggi Hambling's work is often controversial, especially her sculptures; her impastoed wave paintings are superb. One can hear her wild seas smashing on piers and scumbling the shingle on Suffolk shores.

Two of the gallery artists also use impasto to produce an energy similar to Hambling's. Scottish-born George Rowlett has been painting the London Thames for half a century, and his preferred tools are fingers and spatulas. London-born Nick Miller has lived in the west of Ireland for three decades.



Top to bottom: *Splash*, Jeffery Camp, 2009. *Wave Breaking, Morning*, Maggi Hambling, 2007. *Small Water*, Julian Cooper, 2024-25

He is a landscape and portrait painter, and is currently reinventing the still life for our time. Furthermore, he is passionate about waves and storms.

Julian Cooper's interest is in the ways in which water sculpts the landscape of his native Lake District. Ann Dowker concentrates on Nile floods near Luxor, and Jeffrey Camp gives us Chagall-like lovers floating over Beachy Head or Venice.

As it happens, these are all oldie artists. Jeffrey Camp died in 2020 a couple of days short of 97. The others, including Hambling, are still with us and were born in the 1940s, except for Nick Miller, a mere 63.

In recent years, though, I have seen encouraging numbers of younger artists re-occupying and reinventing this middle ground between modern and traditional. 🍷