

Georgia-May Travers Cook
Picnic Lightning

4 June – 11 July 2026

“My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three,” Nabokov writes in *Lolita* (1955). To Georgia-May Travers Cook, “picnic, lightning” is a perfect economy of words, the title and conceptual anchor of her first London solo show. The violence of a life compressed into a clause, beauty and catastrophe made indistinguishable. Two words woven together into something that does not make logical sense and yet rings true. It was this aphoristic quality that the artist returned to while creating the works for *Picnic Lightning*, and its particular resonance with the novel-turned-film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Picnic at Hanging Rock, a favourite of Travers Cook and the story from which *Picnic Lightning* draws inspiration, follows three schoolgirls and a teacher who vanish, without explanation, while exploring the ancient geological site of Hanging Rock. Joan Lindsay’s 1967 novel and Peter Weir’s 1975 film leave their disappearance forever unresolved; one of the “pranks of destiny,” as Lindsay writes.

A narrative is given its power precisely by this refusal of truth. By creating an air of the uncanny, the known rendered suddenly unknowable, we project our own fears, desires, and imaginations onto the void of ambiguity that remains. Viewed from the idealised viewpoint of a set-like Americana porch, the varied painted narratives of *Picnic Lightning* offer no more resolution than the disappearances at Hanging Rock.

From this porch, the characters of Travers Cook’s paintings can be followed into the slowly dimming evening light; across fields, lakes, and picnic

blankets, *Picnic Lightning* traces tranquillity’s descent into turbulence. The pastoral as a site of latent violence is likely not an unfamiliar notion; the garden that conceals, the landscape that does not return what it has been given. Travers Cook works within these landscapes and their thresholds.

Interior with Knives holds its idyllic intensity lightly, curtain-tie bows lifted alluringly as if the hem of a dress, the eye drawn outward to apparent serenity while weapons rest quietly in the corner. The domestic interior has long been a space of peace, solitude, and relaxation; ordered, ornamented, and enclosed. The works in *Picnic Lightning* inhabit that expectation and quietly arm it for what is yet to come. Read alongside *Secret Ways* and *Peaches and Cream*, they lay bare their sensate nature, pleasures and dangers arrayed in full. Food softens on a decorative platter under watchful eyes, curtains peeled back with suspicion are made appealing, all while peace unfurls slowly into danger.

This subtle expectation carries through the works in *Picnic Lightning*. From the sinister delicacy of *Bite* to the infernal black swans of *Still Day*, *Reddening Sky*, aphorism accumulates; image pressed against the atmosphere, beauty pressed against its own concealment. What is repressed waits, poised and decorative, for the right moment. Destiny wanders peacefully through *Picnic Lightning*, while the sun has already begun to set.

Text by Isabella Pensa