

The approach

Thinking of somewhere else

Milton Avery
Gabriella Boyd
Anna Glantz
Merlin James
Stephen McKenna

5 March - 4 April 2026

Preview: Wednesday 4 March, 6-9pm

Dealing with paint as a material forces us to confront the fact that we are also physical material, that we are in a body that is separate from other bodies. Painting to me is so much about the reality of this material, in some ways more so than even sculpture. The artist Charles Ray has written "Space is the sculptor's primary medium, a fact so obvious that it is easy to overlook". In painting, space is always solid material. Maybe the dream-like aspect of my paintings — the fact that they don't quite settle into one image — is my way of creating space. It is not a crystalline container because my paintings never quite resolve, they leave gaps and let in drafts of air.

– Anna Glantz

Interview for Fondazione Imago Mundi, 2025

Thinking of somewhere else brings together Milton Avery, Gabriella Boyd, Anna Glantz, Merlin James and Stephen McKenna; five artists from different generations who attempt to translate our sensory experience of the world into painting. Positioned between abstraction and figuration, the works in the show articulate form through fields of colour, spatial relationships and tonal variations. The works are suggestive of architecture or landscape, yet remain undefined and ambiguous. Painting is approached not as a mode of pure representation, but as a means of revealing connections between vision, memory and language.

Milton Avery was an influential American modernist known for his simplified forms and bold use of colour. Born to a working-class family in Connecticut, he didn't devote himself full-time to art until his move to New York in the 1920s at the age of 40, where his distinctive approach to colour and form later influenced a younger generation of painters including Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. In his late painting *Dark Fir* (1962), Avery typically reduces the landscape to broad, flat planes and strong, simple form, creating a sense of calm and abstraction. The surface texture is notably grainy, with a subtle frottage effect that gives the work a less flattened, more tactile presence. The painting captures a contemplative childlike atmosphere, emphasising colour and composition over realistic detail, reflecting Avery's mature style just two years before his death.

Gabriella Boyd's dream-like compositions blend figuration with abstraction, with figures sometimes cropped, obscured, or interacting with abstract shapes, conveying emotion and psychological tension without relying on literal realism. In the works her preference for warm, earthy tones is revealed; soft blues, greys, ochres, and dusty pinks are layered with gestural brushstrokes and semi-transparent glazes to produce textured and tactile surfaces. She works with light to add depth and movement to her paintings. Recurring motifs such as partial faces, isolated limbs and interior spaces evoke sensations of vulnerability, intimacy and the ephemeral nature of human interaction.

Anna Glantz has increasingly distanced herself from the conventions of figuration, evolving towards a more elusive and formally driven mode of painting. Deeply attentive to the quality of the painted surface, her compositions are densely built up and characterised by landscape-like formats in which horizon lines wobble and familiar imagery recedes, making way for a focus on structure, materiality and surface. In her works (all *Untitled*, 2025),

representational cues have loosened, narratives are de-emphasised, and the depicted forms feel increasingly mysterious, prompting the viewer to consider the painting as an object in its own right. In her pursuit of a space that is unknowable yet undeniable, Glantz's work evokes a haunting ambiguity, exploring how meaning emerges - or dissolves - on the canvas.

Merlin James approaches painting with a considered and unconventional perspective. His typically small-scale works, including *Untitled* (2013) and *Royal Pavilion* (2005-6), explore a wide range of subjects, from everyday architecture and riverside landscapes to post-industrial scenes, empty interiors, and intimate moments. Much of his work investigates new approaches to traditional concerns of narrative, pictorial space, expressive gesture, and the evocative power of colour and texture. James frequently references both classical techniques and contemporary ideas, creating a meaningful dialogue between past and present artistic practices.

Stephen McKenna had a long career that spanned abstraction, figuration and a deeply personal engagement with classical tradition and modernity. In the 1960s, when McKenna was in his '20s and living in London, he embraced a period of remarkable creative freedom that saw him move fluidly between abstraction and evolving figurative modes. In these early works, including *Untitled* (1966) and *Tree with Helicopter* (1967), McKenna assembles vivid fragments of shape and colour in multi-chromatic compositions. Later on, figures began to emerge within these dynamic fields. The paintings from this formative period of McKenna's career are defined by a quest for expanded consciousness and his belief in the power of the imagination, reflecting the ideas of the 1960s avant-garde, absorbing the legacy of Surrealism and the influence of European pop culture.

Milton Avery (b. 1885, New York, USA; d. 1965, New York, USA) is represented in museums and private collections worldwide, including: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Modern Art, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Tate, London; Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum of Art, Madrid, Spain; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

Gabriella Boyd (b. 1988, Glasgow, UK) lives and works in London, UK. Boyd was shortlisted for the John Moores Painting Prize in 2016 and early in her career was commissioned by the Folio Society to illustrate a new edition of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Recent shows include her current solo exhibition in Amsterdam, *I trust you would*, GRIMM, Amsterdam, NL (2025); *Beloved Axis*, Espace Neimeyer, Paris, FR; *Presser*, Cample Line, Scotland (both 2024). In 2026, Boyd will present a solo exhibition at the Yuz Museum in Shanghai.

Anna Glantz (b. 1989, Concord (MA), USA) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA, USA. Recent solo exhibitions include *It's getting grayer and gold and chilly*, Fondazione Bonollo, Vicenza, IT; *Knowing what you know*, Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles (CA), USA (both 2025); *Lichens*, The Approach, London, UK (2023). Recent group exhibitions include *Surface Streets*, Marian Goodman, Los Angeles (CA), USA; *Untitled Exhibition (for Jenni)*, Gordon Robichaux, New York (NY), USA (both 2025); *Trespass Sweetly Urged*, Tanya Leighton, Berlin, DE (2024); *A Minor Constellation*, Chris Sharp, Los Angeles (CA), USA; *The Stands- Ins: Figurative Painting from the Collection*, Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK (2022).

Merlin James (b. 1960, Cardiff, UK) lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland. Recent solo exhibitions include *Hobby Horse*, Sikkema Malloy Jenkins, New York (NY), USA (2025); *Maureen Paley*, London, UK (2024); *Some Steps*, Kunstsaele, Berlin, DE; *Arrival*, Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles (CA), USA; *Merlin James: Piers and Other Structures*, 20 Albert Road, Glasgow, UK (all 2023); *Far and Near*, Anton Kern Gallery, New York (NY), USA (2022); *Window*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, IE (2021). In 2027 he will present solo shows at Camden Art Centre, London and Succession, Vienna.

Stephen McKenna (b. 1939, London, UK; d. 2017, Carlow, IE) was educated at the Slade School of Art. Selected public collections holding McKenna's work include major institutions in the UK such as Tate Britain; Arts Council Collection; British Council Collection; Manchester City Art Gallery; Southampton City Art Gallery; and Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. In Ireland, his work is represented in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin; and Ulster Museum, Belfast. He is also included in collections more broadly within Europe. He had major exhibitions during his lifetime, including being shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1986. In 2019 he had an ambitious posthumous retrospective *A Painter's Life: Stephen McKenna (1939-2017)* at VISUAL, Carlow.

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