

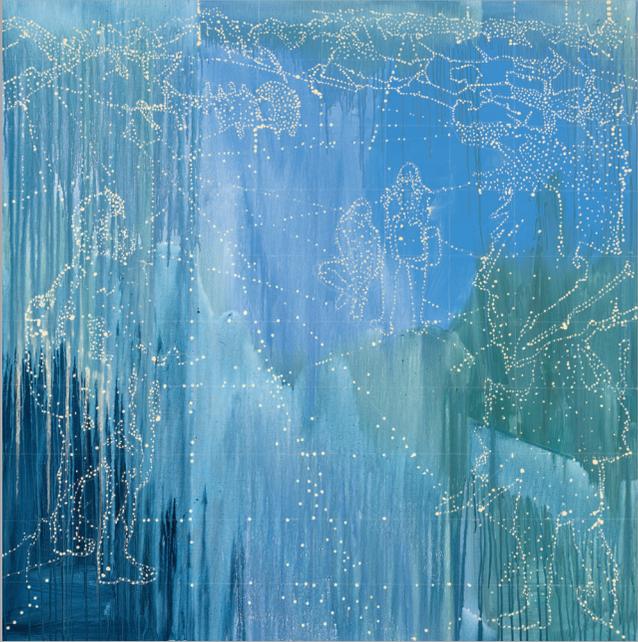


JON CATTAPAN

DISSOLVE

21 . 11 . 2020 – 23 . 12 . 2020

MILANI GALLERY



9.



2.

1. The Group Reacts, 2019-20, oil and acrylic on linen 140cm x180cm (cover)
2. Absence Field (For NH), 2020, oil and acrylic on linen 183cm x 250cm
3. Absence Field (Pink Rain), 2020, oil and acrylic on linen 250cm x 366cm
4. Breaker, 2020, oil and acrylic on linen 183cm x 250cm
5. Sons and Daughters, 2020, oil and acrylic on linen 183cm x 250cm
6. The Pause, 2020, oil and acrylic on linen 140cm x180cm
7. Double Glitch, 2020, oil and acrylic on linen, 140 x 280cm  
(not reproduced)
8. Constellation Group 2, 2019, oil and acrylic on linen, 183 x 250cm  
(not reproduced)
9. Pause 2, 140 x140cm, 2020, oil and acrylic on linen, 140cm x140cm
10. Absence Field (distension), 2020 oil on linen, 183cm x250cm  
(not reproduced)





3.

"all that is certain falls into itself and evaporates"

### **In Conversation: Jon Cattapan & Natalie King (02.11.2020, Melbourne)**

As Melbourne emerged from harsh lockdown, artist Jon Cattapan commenced a conversation with curator Natalie King discussing turbulence and uncertainty, friendship and loss and the reflective capabilities of painting. Their longstanding association and friendship dates back to Cattapan's early series *The City Submerged* (1991), escapades when Cattapan had a studio in Greene Street Soho and Williamsburg in New York (1989 – 91) and more recent scholarly forays at the Victorian College of the Arts. Here, they discuss literature and the complexities of our current condition of precarity, political volatility and dissolution.

**Can you discuss the origins of the exhibition title *Dissolve*, associated with *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* and the transition or changing metaphysical states? I am also thinking about your 1991 exhibition *The City Submerged* where I wrote about haze and dissolution in your work.**

In 1991, whilst living in New York I made an abstract work called Dissolve (There but not there), it was one of the early pictures made in my Williamsburg studio as part of The City Submerged suite. I didn't know about Marshall Berman's book at the time as I was introduced to it much later by my friend, Chris McAuliffe. I discovered retrospectively that the dislocations I had felt through the social and political conditions of an emergent globalisation, encountered whilst living in the United States, was articulated in such a cogent way in that book. Now, I am thinking more about how, in a time of world turbulence, all that is certain falls into itself and evaporates. There is a strangely dark political undercurrent but also poetic possibilities for me as a painter.

**Your new work for the exhibition Dissolve at Milani Gallery is drenched in a crimson haze, at times fuchsia with figures drifting in uncertainty, devoid of place. Can you elaborate on this sensibility of evaporation as our calendars and lives have dissipated during the pandemic? How has COVID and working in an intimate home environment, away from the studio affected you?**

For some time, I have been making works that could loosely be characterised as a claiming of territory or search for place or community. More recently, partly due to how the world is travelling; COVID, unstable politics and my own personal situation, the ideas have coalesced around painting a figuration that is composed or declared through information points and 'data'. Secondly, I have been aiming for these more saturated fields which are generally but not always overlaid. I am trying out abstraction with more purpose: these fields are much more foregrounded.

Unfortunately, over the immense 2020 Melbourne lockdown of 112 days, I had to put aside large paintings and instead, I returned to more intimate drawings and watercolours, which have become notations for new possibilities. It's been a frustrating time for everyone, but different imperatives emerged. My drawings have always been more private, less fussed in some ways and I have rediscovered again that drawing is joy, painting is war!

**In Arundhati Roy's prescient essay, *The Pandemic is a Portal*, she describes how "pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it." Your new work reminds me of how we are passing from one type of existence to imagining another world, which is often the role of artists. What are your thoughts?**

Art can't really change much, but still I believe it has the capacity to allow for a reflective observation of our times. Arundhati Roy's essay is a marvelous reminder that turbulence always ultimately results in new ways of thinking. Artists have an opportunity to explore more connected, interdisciplinary approaches by creating things that are intrinsically connected to the broader community's feelings, not just art world preoccupations. However, interdisciplinarity does not apply so much to my painting approach. Instead, I find myself thinking more about about viscerality, albeit tempered. I am hoping that my paintings might still be able to operate in a register that 'belongs' but is also a respite as we learn to live with and think through the turbulence that Roy describes.

**Often you draw on popular culture source material such as newspaper clippings or from the internet and occasionally hark back to Renaissance painting and your Venetian heritage. What are some of the referents in this new series?**

It's a real mash-up, and always has been, but there is a certain 'style' that revolves around layering and presenting images as pixelated, dotted forms or outlines or constellations. The images themselves, in this show, come largely from trawling the internet and compositing 'protest groups'. The Group Reacts is a good example – now of course the masked figures in this work have a completely different connotation. I have also used my own photos too and I'm doing this more now, so there's a personal investment for me in some of the images. I find myself 'staging' groups. This is what happened in Sons and Daughters. Then again, concurrently, I think of abandoning figuration entirely – it's a long-term tussle. That duality and the resulting diametrically opposed explorations has kept me working away all these years!

**Two of the works, For NH and Pink Rain intimate the loss of two dear friends - Noel Hutchison and Kate Daw - with traces of the body traveling to elsewhere. How have notions of loss and vanishing impacted your work?**

These two are very personal works. I've gone back to my most important tool, colour, as the optimal painterly conveyor of human spirit. The high key melting shards in For NH or the softer transparent crimson veils in Pink Rain have an internal logic that ties them inextricably to what I feel for two friends. How colors are brought forth is an utter mystery to me – it happens very quickly. There's a kind of physical discharge that I am not in control of; it's always been there and its certainly not something that can be taught. Somehow, these two works also go beyond personal loss.

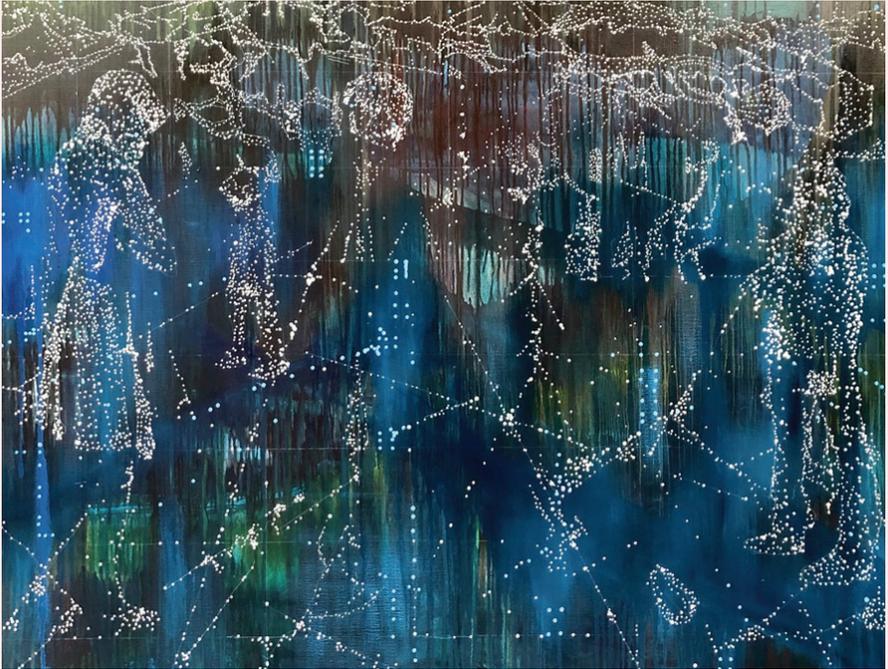
**The Pause and The Group Reacts have crowds of huddled figures referencing the way groups have communed around protest, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo: Can you elaborate on the clustering of figures and the contemporary condition of uprising and public assembly?**

The Pause, The Group Reacts and Sons and Daughters are again all amalgams of various episodes, but they are not so much about various protests per se, rather I hope these works 'bear witness' though I prefer the viewer to make their own call on the narrative. I must say the last twelve months with the vehement determination of communities to give voice very publicly to their concerns has been an important time and certainly a clear signal of our turbulent world. It has made me nostalgic for the Vietnam Moratorium 'Demos' that we went along to surreptitiously as school kids, here in Melbourne.

**In a recent interview you have said "My biggest enemy is time, but I'm determined. I feel very alive as an artist now", suggesting a sense of urgency and preoccupation with extending your practice. What are the circumstances that have led to this epiphany?**

No real epiphany, but I guess put simply, I feel that painting still has great communicative currency - there are very few things left in the world that are conceived of, developed and made from start to end by the one person. I remain determined to consolidate poetic potential with a social dimension. And how to reconcile my innate inclination towards narrative with a growing abstract sensibility? - that remains to be tested much more deeply, against these 'interesting' times we are living in.





6.

## MILANI GALLERY

1/270 Montague Road

West End Q 4101

p. +617 3846 6046

e. [info@milanigallery.com.au](mailto:info@milanigallery.com.au)

w. [www.milanigallery.com.au](http://www.milanigallery.com.au)

## Acknowledgements

This exhibition is the result of research supported partially by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council's Discovery Projects funding scheme (project DP170101912).

Jon Cattapan also gratefully acknowledges the support of his research by the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Research Council**

