

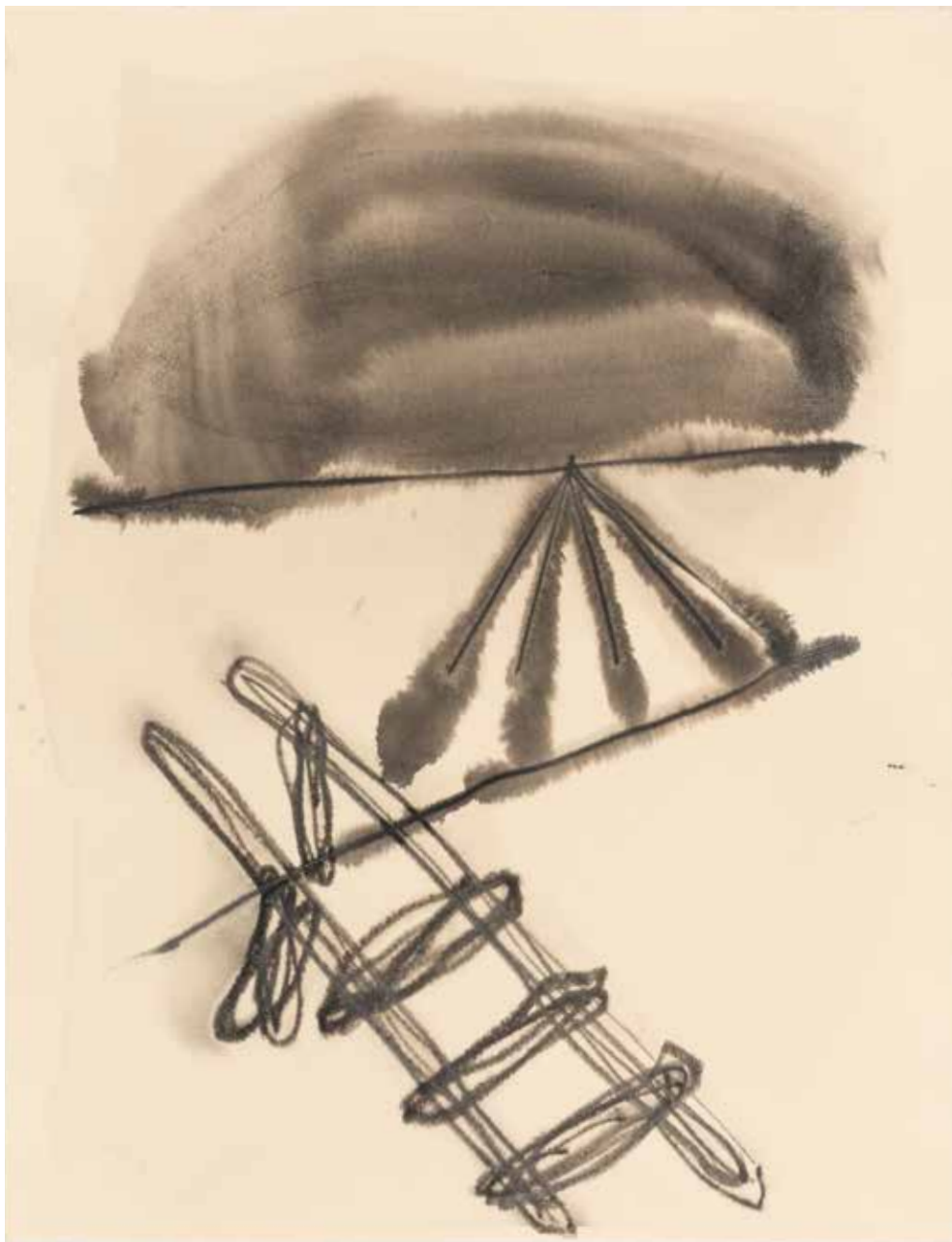
basil beattie
frances aviva blane
2021

ecArt

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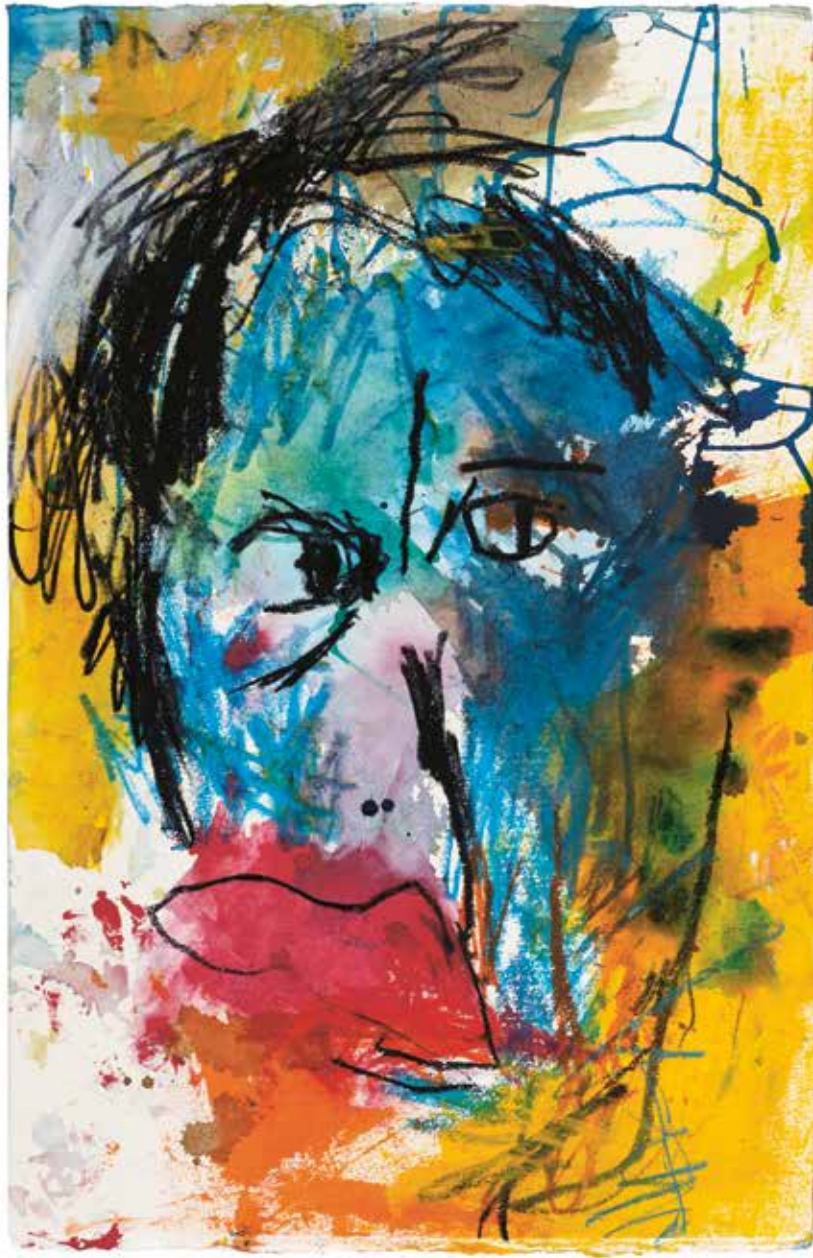
Untitled | charcoal/paper | 35.6x27.4 cms

Basil Beattie and Frances Aviva Blane

To create marks on a surface expresses a fundamental human desire to mirror and make sense of the world. For the child, drawing is a way of exploring boundaries, of developing perception and notions of 'I and not I'. Verbal communication offers just a tiny insight into the mind, whilst drawing gives an unspoken glimpse into the psyche. Many of us doodle, but mostly we lose the natural childhood ability to draw and paint, becoming self-conscious and critical. The artist, however, continues to nurture this ability to foster a tactile and sensual relationship with their materials that most of us have lost. Their gestures, whilst still partly unconscious, articulate a superior visual sensibility, an understanding of equivalences, substitutions, and metaphors.

Two artists for whom the physicality of the surface remains paramount are Frances Aviva Blane and Basil Beattie, RA. For both, the relationship with the body – the reach of the arm, the pressure of the hand, the co-ordination of the eye – is paramount. Form, process and subject are inextricable. The line and mark a graphic, dynamic delineation of their thinking.

Basil Beattie, RA, the older of the two artists, has his sensibility deeply rooted in the post-war New York school of painters. The imagery and feeling of his work owes allegiance to Philip Guston. Over the years, Beattie has worked with a series of archetypes: ladders, staircases and ziggurats. The sense of existential alienation is palpable. In these works colour is absent. Black dominates. His flights of steps lead only to ambiguous passageways and uncertain voids. The rungs of his ladders collapse or are bound onto their wooden struts with a savage carelessness. Whilst imitating the appearance of actual things, his iconography has become more abstract, expressing deep psychological dis-ease. This is a manifesto to failure. The dark despair of Sam Beckett – 'I can't go on, I'll go on' – made visual in a way that only an artist can articulate. For Beckett believed, as Beattie surely



Blue black head | charcoal/acrylic/waterford | 76x56 cms

does, that failure is an essential part of any artist's work. The urgency of his pictograms forces us to become witnesses to his powerful psychodramas, ones that are often uncomfortable and overwhelming, but always profound.

Frances Aviva Blane paints heads, but they're no more 'real' than Basil Beattie's steps and ziggurats. There's a physical savagery to her mark-making, as if stirring her images out of the ether by spells and incantations. At other times, they feel like forms of decimation or erasure, as if she were angrily quoting T.S. Elliot's lines: "that's not what I meant at all...that's not it at all." Her charcoal scrawls evoke notions of calligraphy, of a nascent language. As in the late Susan Hiller's work, there's a concern between the communicable and the incommunicable, the conscious and the unconscious. Blane's heads – which reverberate like Bacon's furious, screaming Popes – play with the relationship between the natural and chance, the personal and the social, what is known and what is not. In her dense, scribbled and blotted images there are multiple languages, correspondences and codes. But unlike Beattie's dour black and white ziggurats and ladders there is, in Blane's brazen scarlet and bile-yellow blotches, an anarchic, chthonic sensuality that echoes Dubuffet, Cy Twombly and the Outsider Artist, Danielle Jacqui.

Both Beattie and Blane ally themselves to the fundamental existential questions of modernism rather than to the irony of postmodernism, whilst being aware of the decentring of the contemporary subject. This can only ever lead to a perpetual series of open-ended questions, to the urgency of making further images and the perpetual quest for sense and meaning.

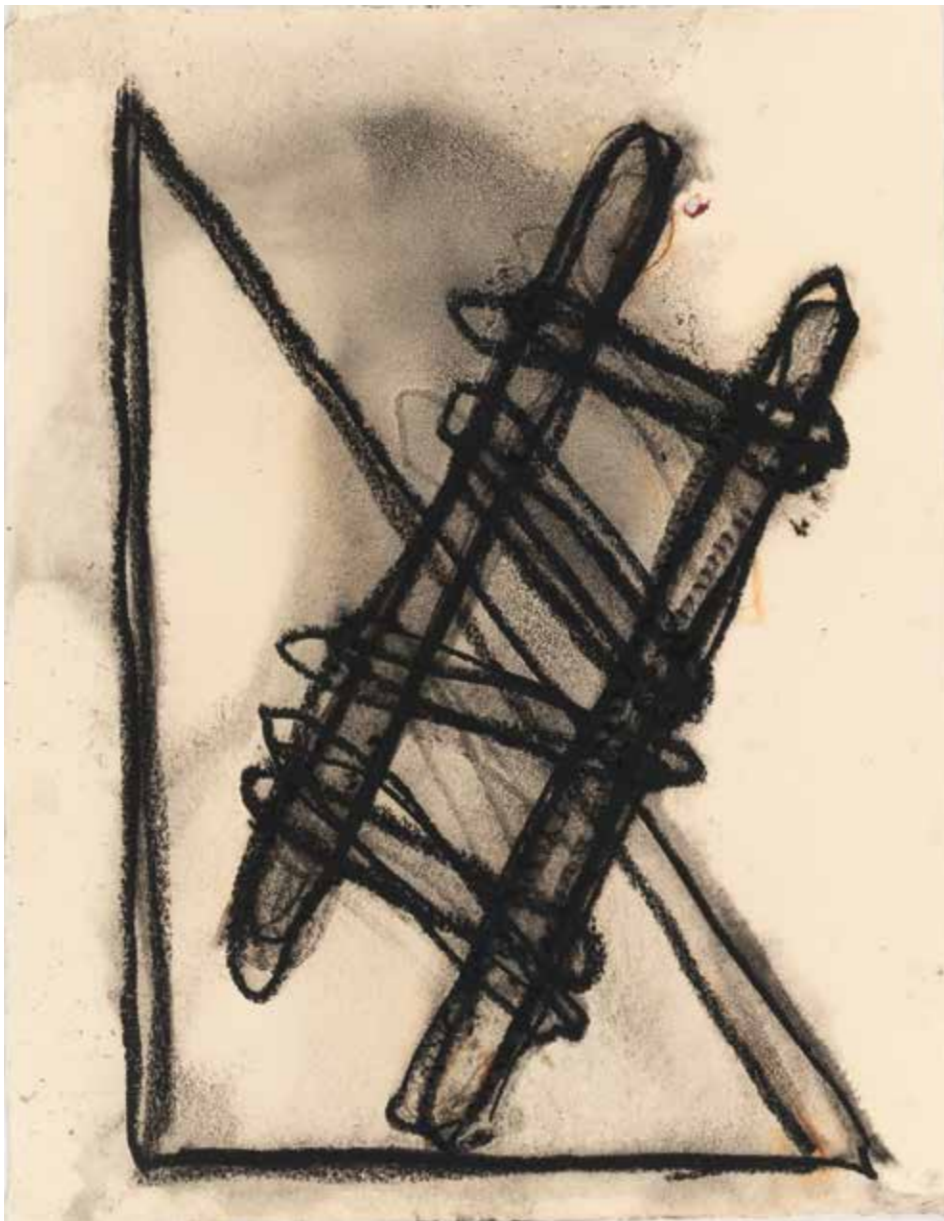
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Sue Hubbard is a freelance art critic and main feature writer for Artlyst. A novelist and poet, she has published a collection of short stories and three novels. Her latest, Rainsongs, is published by Duckworth, Overlook Press, US. Mercure de France and Yilin Press, China. Her fourth poetry collection, Swimming to Albania is due from Salmon Press, Ireland.

basil beattie RA



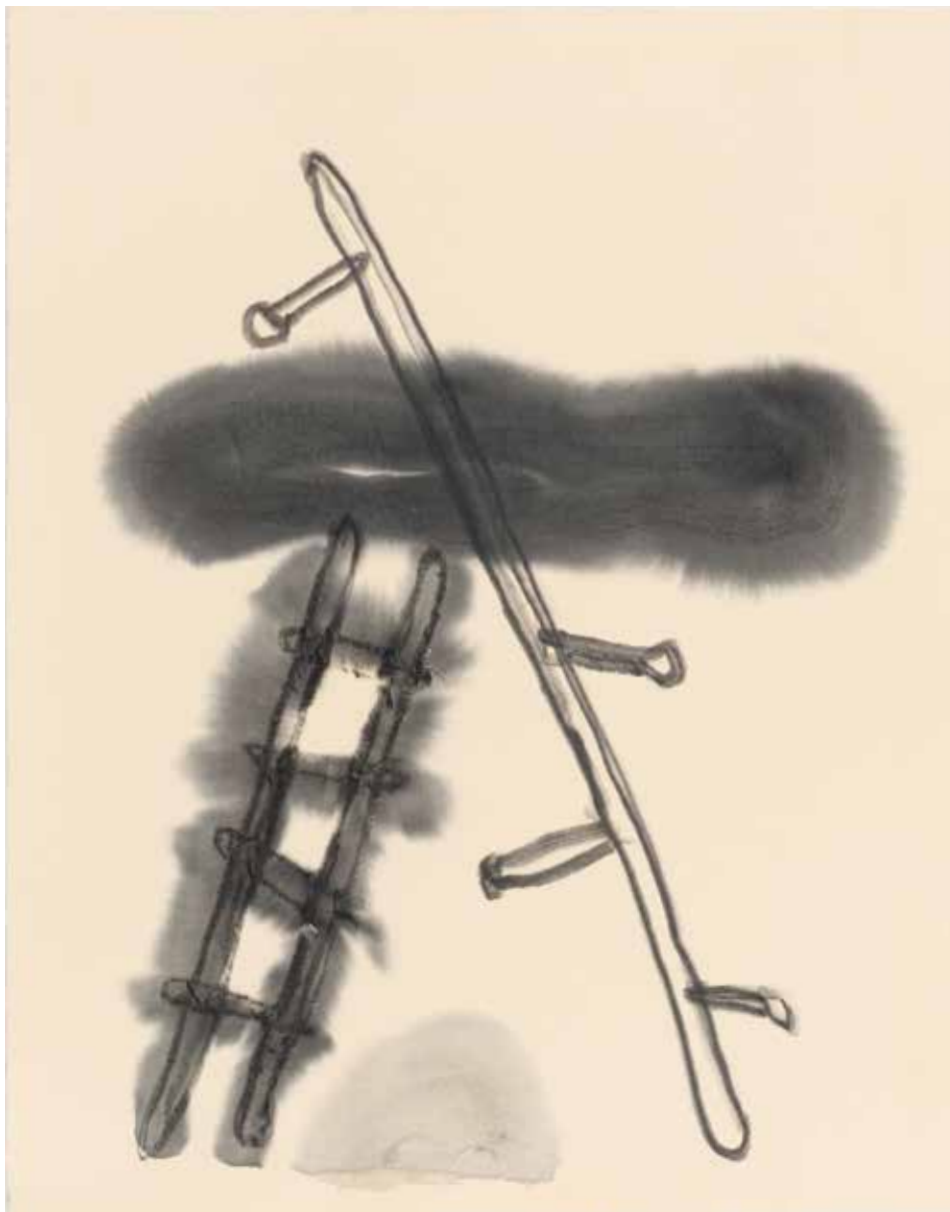
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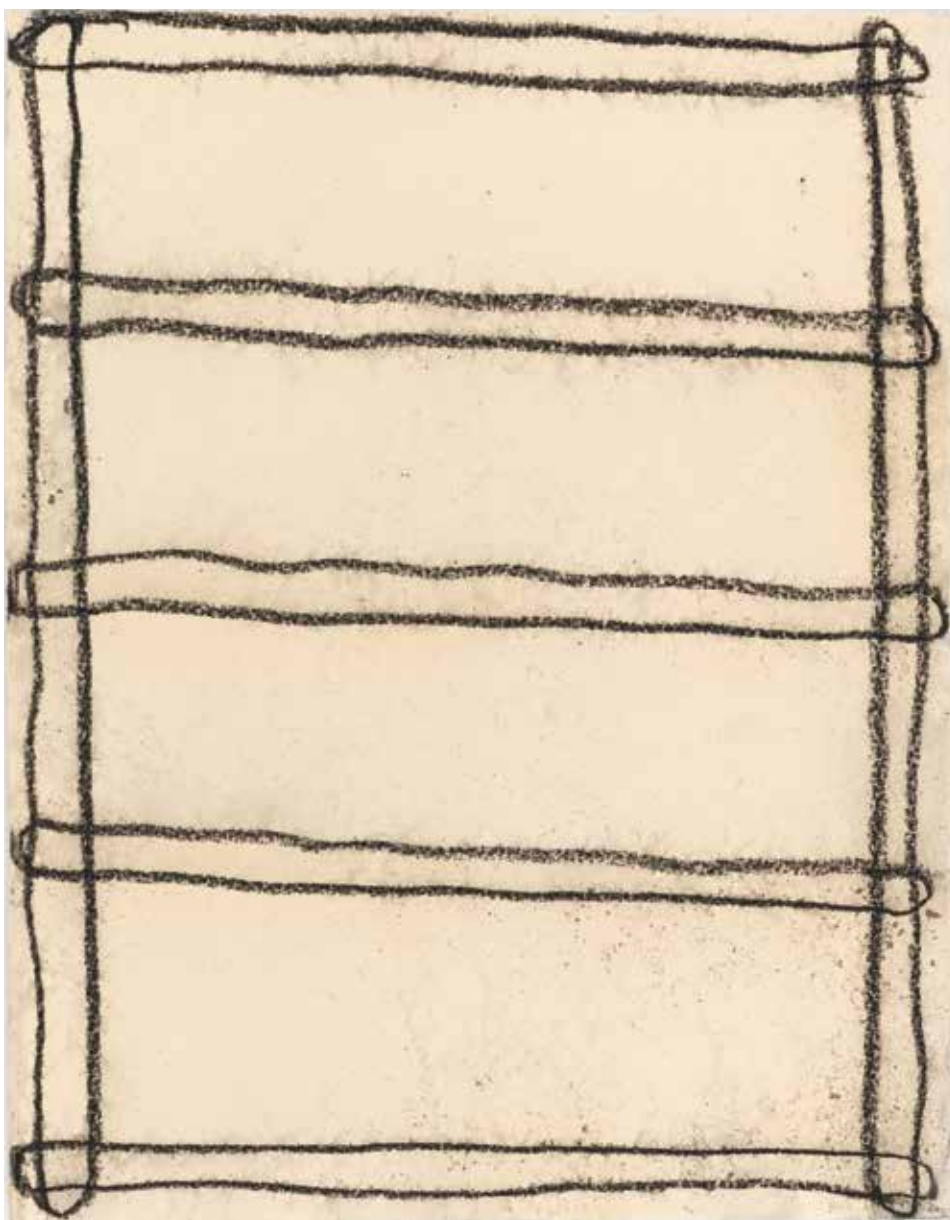
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Untitled | charcoal/paper | 36x28.2 cms



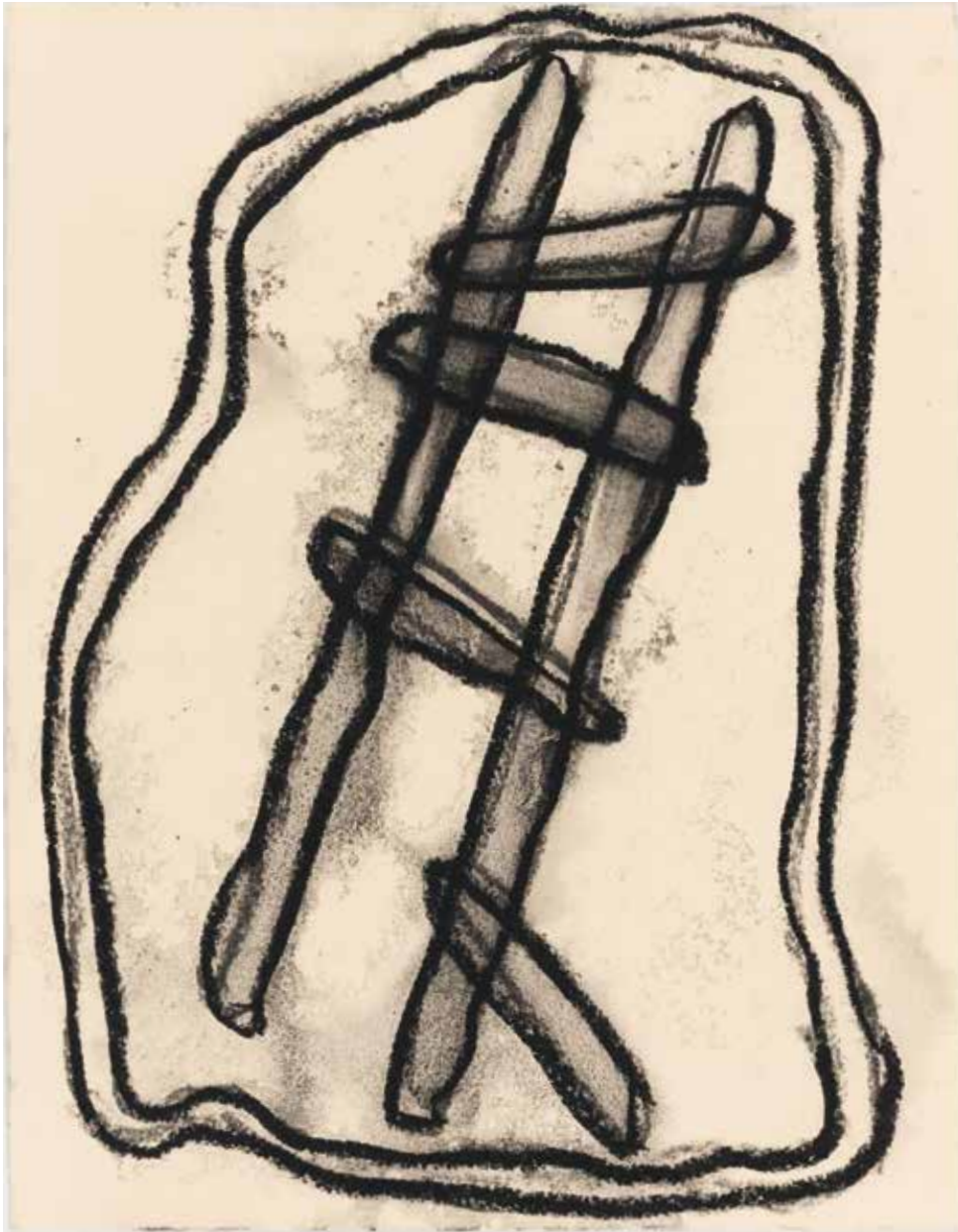
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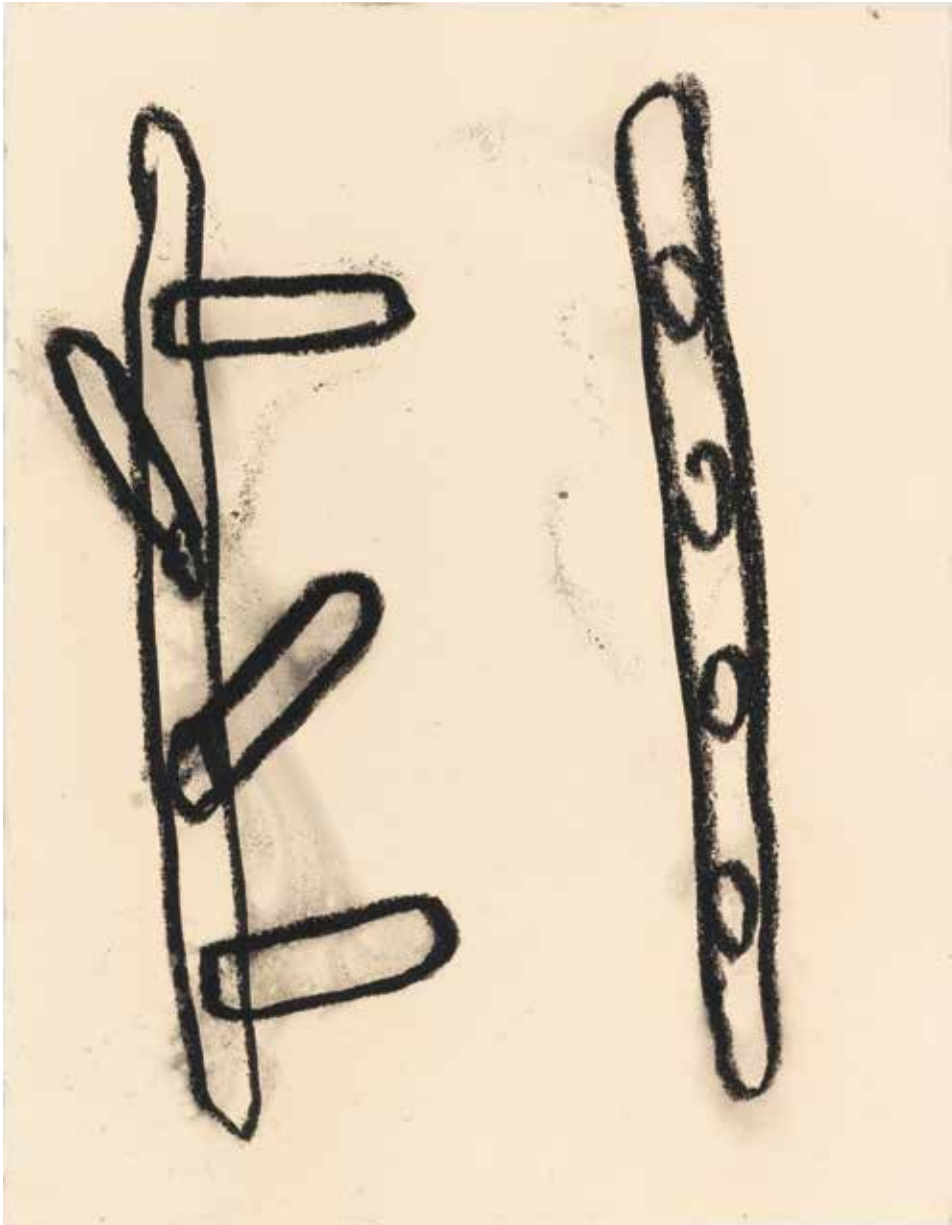
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Untitled | charcoal/paper | 35.7x27.7 cms



Untitled | charcoal/paper | 35.6x27.4 cms



Untitled | charcoal/paper | 35.7x27.7 cms



Untitled | charcoal/paper | 35.6x27.7 cms



Basil Beattie, RA, (b. 1935, West Hartlepool, UK) graduated from the Royal Academy schools in 1961 and was elected a member of the Royal Academy of Arts in 2006. Beattie lives and works in Mitcham, Surrey.

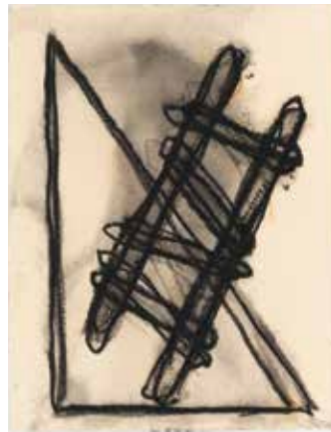
Beattie's work has been in numerous exhibitions and institutions, including solo shows at Tate Britain, London, UK; Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK; Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, UK; Jerwood Gallery, Hastings, UK; IKON Gallery, Birmingham, UK; Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, UK; Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, UK; and Goldsmiths Gallery, London, UK. His works have been included in critical group exhibitions at the Barbican Centre, London, UK; Camden Arts Centre (London, UK) as well as the Jerwood Painting Prize 1998 and 2001 at Jerwood Gallery, London, UK; and Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, UK; and John Moores Painting Prize exhibition in 2015, 2016 and 2017 at Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK. Beattie's work can be found in numerous public and private collections including: Arts Council England; Tate collections; Contemporary Art Society; Deutsche Bank; Government Art Collection; NatWest Group Art; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; Royal Academy Collection; and the Jerwood Collection, all UK.

He is represented in London and New York by Hales Gallery and in Sweden by Larsen Warner.

Basil Beattie and Frances Aviva Blane

"Abstraction, is now over. It's run its course, taking away the shadows from European art" wrote iconic British artist David Hockney in a recent edition of *The Art Newspaper* (30th September 2021). Commenting on the unique quality of pre-19th century art, the chiaroscuro technique in painting, Hockney laments loss of observation through the act of drawing the world and humans, lights, shadows and depths.

Hockney makes a good point about the importance of drawing and observing the world which can rarely be captured through the camera, but he is also rather sweeping about abstraction in art. Abstraction transcends the



immediately observable, offering ambiguity over the need to be precise, literal, conceptual, narratorial, historical, identitarian or political, which are the current trends in contemporary art.

Basil Beattie, RA, was profoundly influenced by Abstract Expressionist art that grew out of New York between the late 1940s to 1960. His work, however, isn't pure abstraction. Beattie's work is replete with symbols. Steps, ladders, corridors, entrances, doorways, tunnels, pathways, ziggurats. Geometric shapes also feature, drawn without precision. While his art is not driven by narrative or place, an immediate association which his images conjure

up is the Biblical story of Jacob's Ladder: *"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."* Genesis 28:12

This mythic, redemptive story of Jacob's dream of seeing a ladder leading from earth up to heaven affirms the connection between God and man, and His chosen people, the Israelites. The other recurring symbol in Beattie's work is the ziggurat, the ancient huge architectural structure in ancient Mesopotamia of a geometric stepped tower leading to a shrine or temple. Both are quests for spiritual salvation and transformation, but in Beattie's work, his ladders go nowhere, they lead at best to a dark, murky, ghostly grey mist of ink or paint – darkness and abstract shades of black. The marks of his paintings are controlled but are also furious, expressions of frustration and uncertainty. There is no heaven, the present is a path to nowhere. This is a journey within, lost, and perhaps without hope.

Frances Aviva Blane's work shares some common ground with Beattie, both find the medium of expressive painting, as both action and image, as journeys within the self. Where Beattie's work may be more Jungian – universal, mythic, religious symbols – Blane is more Freudian. She excavates the struggling fury with the human self, colour is aggressively applied without formal shapes or boundaries. Blane's drawings liberate the impulsive and irrational unconscious and assaults our "reality principle" (to quote Freud). Emotionally charged by a physical energy, the drawings on display have no explicit external references. Are they responding to our social/political environment? Are they a cri-du-coeur? Blane's *Blue black head* (charcoal/acrylic/waterford, 76x56 cm) is awash with intense, scribbling vivid colours. A blotchy red, messy blues and yellows, the black charcoal marks out hair, eyes and lips that hints at a self-portrait of the artist. It's an unsettling face. Other drawings by Blane have the black charcoal attacking and assaulting the surface, blotching out colour. Not all the works are "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (Shakespeare, Macbeth). *Blue* (acrylic/

tissue paper, 15x20 cm) is a softer, delicate abstract drawing, the shades of blue convey a far more tranquil inner landscape, like a musical interlude, a calm between the storms.

Our lives are saturated and bombarded with real and hyper-real representation. Like Thomas Jerome Newton (performed by David Bowie) in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) who sits transfixed to a bank of TV screens, we too are hypnotised and consumed by digitised mass media. "Leave my mind alone!



get out of my mind, all of you!" Newton screams, like a tortured soul, at the 12 TV screens. The selfies, the glamour, the material opulence which bombard us on social and mainstream media make us want to scream at the digital screen. There are darkness and storms within us, and there is a human desire to seek something beyond, as we climb the ladder, walk along paths leading to God knows where.

Beattie and Blane are important voices, reminding us that, through abstraction and expression, going beyond representation, social commentary and observation, we seek meaning and experience beyond our material world.

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Manick Govinda is a freelance art writer, artists mentor, lecturer, curator and cultural commentator. His writings have been published on a number of platforms and publications. You can find his writings and media appearances online on Authority.

frances aviva blane



Red/black/white | oil/linen | 50x60 cms



Shadow | pencil/fabriano | 30x30 cms



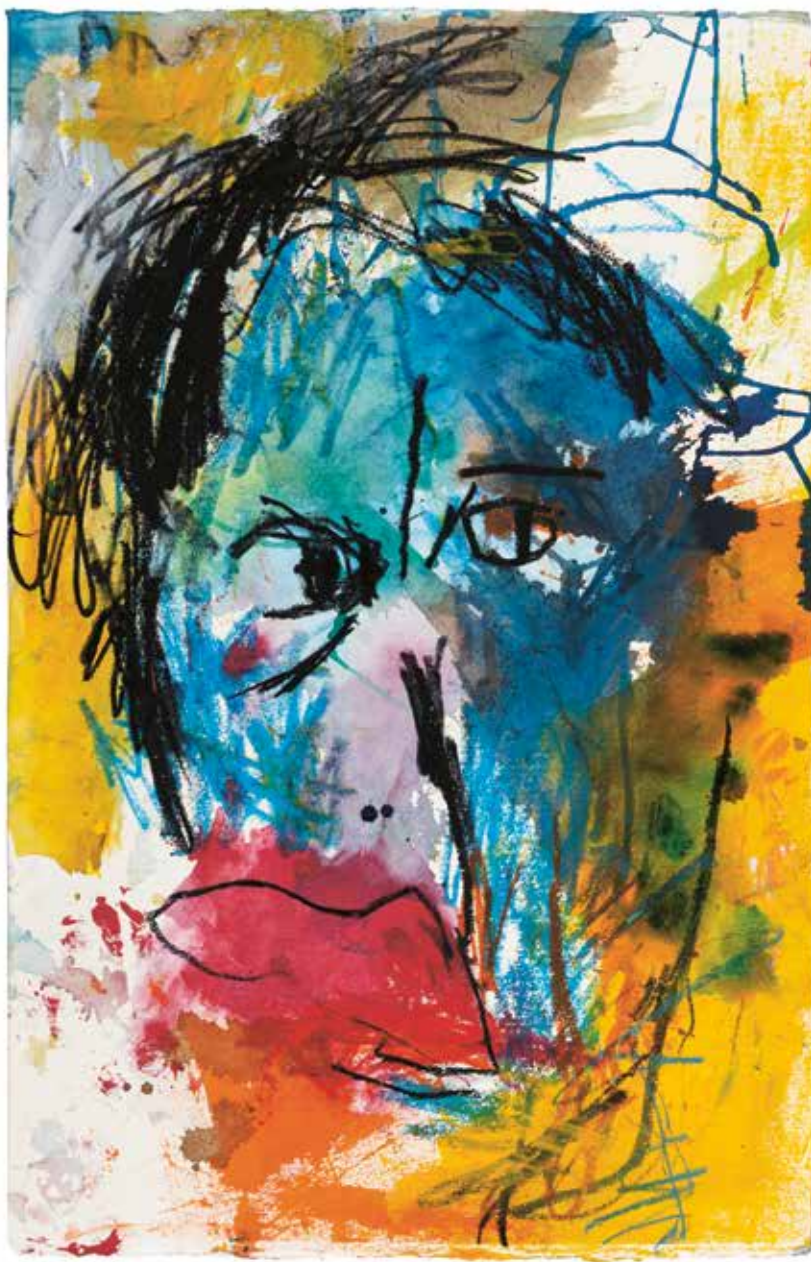
Blue | acrylic/tissue paper | 15x20 cms



Tracked 2 | charcoal/acrylic/linen | 50x60 cms



Sheet | acrylic/khadi | 43x43 cms



Blue black head | charcoal/acrylic/waterford | 76x56 cms



Tracked 3 | oil/linen | 50x60 cms



August 2 | charcoal/chalk/waterford | 56x76 cms



Drawing | charcoal/acrylic/waterford | 28x38 cms



Red head | charcoal/acrylic/fabiano | 38x28 cms



Frances Aviva Blane is a British painter living and working in London. Blane studied post graduate painting at the Slade 1991-1993. and won a scholarship to work at Djerassi Artist's Colony in California. She is a recipient of a Jerwood Drawing Award.

In 2014 Blane exhibited alongside Bacon and Bourgeois at De Queeste Art Gallery in Belgium. In 2016/2017 Blane had a solo show at the German Embassy London and more recently has shown in the John Moores Painting Prize and Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize and the Ruth Borchard Self-Portrait Prize.

Blane has exhibited in the UK, Europe, Japan and Australia. In 2021 Director Penny Woolcock made a documentary about her work titled *Who is Frances Aviva Blane?* with an accompanying book.

Blane also appeared with Susie Orbach in *Two Metres Apart*, another film by Penny Woolcock.

Blane has published many books with critics Eddy Frankel, Corinna Lotz, Diana Souhami, Morgan Falconer and Sacha Craddock, amongst others.

More recently she and Susie Orbach collaborated on publications *COVID* and *FAB*.

Blane's work is in many collections including Blind Art, London; Jesus College, Cambridge; The London School of Economics; Moorfields Eye Hospital, London; The Sternberg Centre, London; The Usher Gallery, Lincoln; The Faith and Belief Forum, London; The Tim Sayer Collection, London; The Doris Jean Lockhart Collection.

She is represented in Belgium by De Queeste Art and in London and Oxford by Zuleika Gallery and ecArtspace.com

In 2022 Blane will show with Susan Stockwell in 'Sea of Change' in Lemnos, Greece.

For more information on Frances visit: www.avivablane.com

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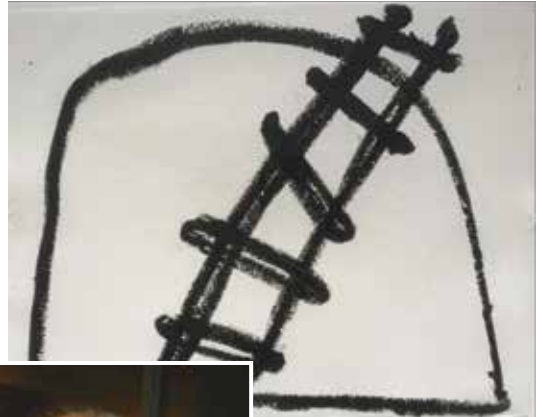
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Basil Beattie, RA, or Frances Aviva Blane.

DRAWING

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