

ALICE INSTONE

BECAUSE A FIRE WAS IN MY HEAD

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INTRODUCTION

The Cob Gallery is excited to present a solo exhibition by Alice Instone: Because A Fire Was In My Head. The show features recent paintings by the artist that explore the prominence of powerful female muses in history and art history.

Instone makes paintings concerned with gender and power, frequently depicting influential or well known public figures. Her work draws attention to how we consume images of women and the female archetype, from the dangerous seductress to the alluring innocent.

These sexually charged paintings of women express the conviction that painting and making marks on a surface can achieve a sense of reality like no other medium. Offering therapeutic release they are a series of portraits of the artist's most intimate feelings about the female image.

The title of the exhibition comes from the Yeats poem, 'The Song of Wandering Aengus'; the elusive female muse, forever sought by the titular narrator, permeates Instone's paintings; the line 'because a fire was in my head' itself an expression of the creative process.

Appropriating historical stories and images Instone creates a totally immersive art that contains a sense of the past and the present. From Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Bronzino's *Venus*, this layering of images and meaning is both a conversation with our visual history and an enquiry into the potency of certain images.

THE HOUSE OF FALLEN WOMEN

2010, OIL, GOLD LEAF & BRONZE POWDER ON CANVAS, 150cm x 150cm

Although all the [paintings] are stunning, perhaps my favourite is the eponymous one: five naked models, draped in electric-blue swags, with gold paint dripping over them from the ceiling. It reminds me of the story of the tram crash that injured the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Impaled on a massive shard of metal, Kahlo came round to discover that someone on the tram had been carrying a tin of gold paint, and she was now covered in it. Gilded like a living human idol. A painful, disturbing and new image of womanhood.

CAITLIN MORAN



SLEEPING BEAUTY

2011, OIL, GOLD LEAF & BRONZE POWDER ON CANVAS, 150cm x 150cm

I lingered upon 'Sleeping Beauty' in the insomnia tortured hour between 3 and 4 am, finding solace in her beauties entwined in golden thorns. Severed, floating flesh fragments the fairytale I so nostalgically and naively read to my daughter. The scarlet gown of Rubens' 'Delilah' here becomes more a blanket of fire, a warning or a curse. We peer into a fantastical gilded forest as beauty wakes, but from what, and into what, one queries, as the eye wanders from bleeding gold, to icy shivers, to the heart's burning furnace, eyes wide open. I feel both outside and inside a cage, awake but dreaming, lost between the modern and the ancient, but suddenly more alive in the night.

LAURA BAILEY



POPE JOAN

2011, OIL, GOLD LEAF & BRONZE POWDER ON CANVAS, 150cm x 150cm



Pope Joan (sketch), 2011

Pope Joan allegedly disguised herself as a man in order to reign as Pope and was only exposed when she gave birth whilst riding. Alice's ambiguous painting is visually striking and saturated with energy - a visual oxymoron it combines violence with femininity, splendour with darkness.

VICTORIA WILLIAMS



DANAE

2012, OIL, GOLD LEAF & BRONZE POWDER ON CANVAS, 150cm x 150cm

*Alice is evolving...bursting through her more conventional stylistic portraits, towards the sublime, ecstatic and transcendent!
How wonderful to see her colours explode all over the canvas, as the boundary lines dissolve from literal to mystical.*

ANNIE LENNOX



PAX

2012, OIL, GOLD LEAF & BRONZE POWDER ON CANVAS, 150cm x 150cm

I love this painting. Any woman who has breastfed knows the experience of shooting milk darts with abandon. It makes me laugh that people are so squeamish about lactating breasts. We are happy to have women's nakedness draped over cars and festooning page 3 but the very function for which breasts primarily exist so often evokes grunts of disapproval or prim censure. Alice has captured the sensuousness of the whole business. It's beautiful.

BARONESS HELENA KENNEDY QC



KALAJUGGAH

2012, OIL, GOLD LEAF & BRONZE POWDER ON CANVAS, 150cm x 150cm

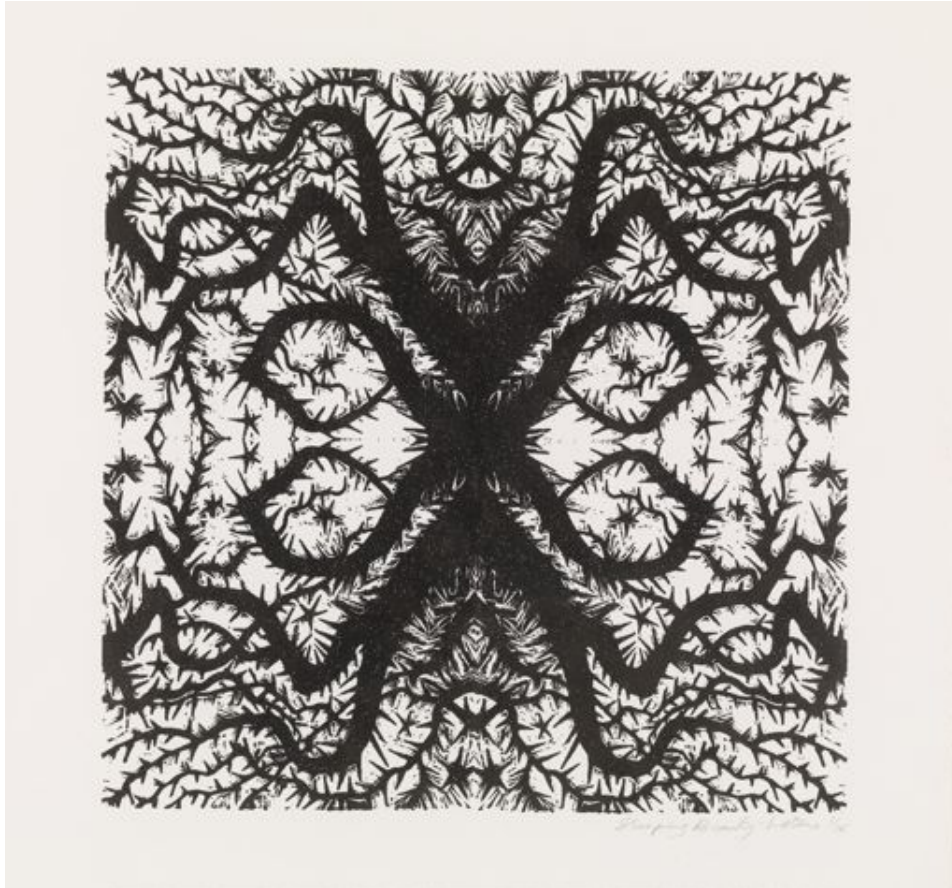
Kalajuggah translates as 'a dark and secret spot' and this painting creates just that. During the Raj they were the shadowy corners of dances where flirtations took place. There is a furtive and forbidden atmosphere to this piece; the decadent gold leaf and deep red enhance the texture of naked skin and animal pelt. The scene seems to be lit almost by firelight. Kalajuggah is a seductive and powerful portrait of female sexuality.

POLLY STENHAM



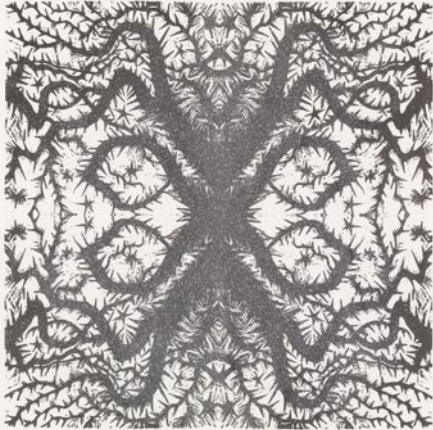
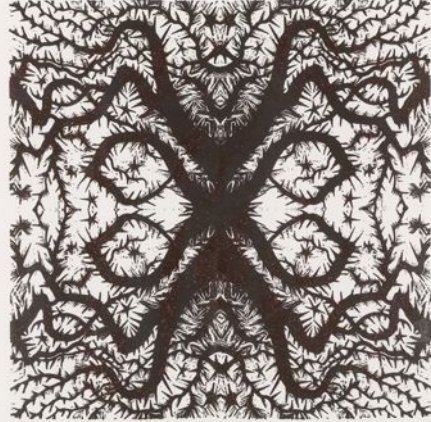
SLEEPING BEAUTY

2012, LINOPRINT WITH EMBEDDED GLITTER, EDITION OF 15



In “Sleeping Beauty”, Alice captures the bleak mystical grace of the forest of thorns as viewed from the captive’s window. Thorns are intriguing in this print as in our wider culture – capable of representing both a healthy irritant ‘in the side’ of unchecked power and the darker more painful side of love and beauty.

SHAMI CHAKRABARTI CBE



THE ARTIST

Alice Instone started working as an artist in 2005 and has since exhibited widely across the UK and abroad in venues including the House of Commons, Royal Society of Arts, The House of St Barnabas in Soho, Chanel Head Office and Northampton Museum. Her solo shows include *The House of Fallen Women*, *In History Anonymous Was A Woman* and *21st Century Women*.

Jenni Murray interviewed her for Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* in 2009 and she was selected as a Woman of Achievement 2010 by Woman of the Year and shortlisted for the Shell Women of the Future Award. Her work is held in several public collections and has been sponsored by Ernst & Young and Herbert Smith.

She has worked with Annie Lennox, Emilia Fox, Baronesses Kennedy, Scotland and Greenfield, Laura Bailey, Elle Macpherson, Bianca Jagger, Sir Peter Blake, Beverley Knight, Baron Woolf, Alice Temperley, Jo Wood, Pattie Boyd, Shami Chakrabarti, Nicole Farhi, Sir David Hare, Dame Evelyn Glennie, Dame Jackie Wilson, and Cherie Blair amongst others.

THANKS TO:

The sitters, the writers, the sponsors, The Cob Gallery, Nick Leigh at Fisheye Framing, Angelica Sule, Medeia Cohan-Petrolino, Gemma Harrison, Hugh, Beatrice & Arlo Billett and Felicity Instone.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Hugh Gilbert

CATALOGUE DESIGN: Liam Hess

THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS

I WENT out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done, The silver
apples of the moon, The golden apples of the sun.

THE
COB
GALLERY
