

CAMPLE—LINE

YELENA POPOVA / MADE GROUND

01.10.22- 11.12.22

For her exhibition this autumn, Yelena Popova has produced a new group of paintings, for which she has used soil and rock that she collected locally to Cample. A new painting installation, it continues and extends a wider body of work that Yelena calls 'post-petrochemical paintings,' which she began in 2017 during a residency at Girton College, Cambridge, where she worked with gathered materials and natural pigments for the first time. Installed by Yelena in our upstairs space, these new paintings are to date her most sustained exploration of a place through soil, stone, pigment, gesture and colour.

Made Ground, the exhibition's title, is the term used to refer to land where natural and undisturbed soils have largely been replaced by man-made or artificial materials. In developing her work for Cample, Yelena has drawn upon her interest in the relationship between geological depository and the kinds of artificial deposits or changes to land surface that are a legacy of local industries such as mining, particularly in agricultural landscapes such as Dumfries & Galloway's. Mining for materials and mineral resources has happened across the region over centuries and while some remnants of this industrial activity are evident on the land and more obviously so in the built environment, other traces remain hidden from view underground in the soil.

An interest in land use, in our industrial activities and heritage is often central to Yelena's work. Whilst at Cample, she visited several former local sandstone quarries whose faces, for all their subsequent reclamation by natural forces, continue to expose registers of deep time alongside more recent human histories of extraction. A large ornamental carved sandstone fruit bowl in the grounds of nearby Drumlanrig Castle, overgrown with moss, fascinated her for the way in which the moss will slowly turn the stone back into earth. Walking in the area, by the river, she was drawn to an iron-rich rock, which 'bled' a deep terracotta pigment.

Yelena gathered soils, pieces of red sandstone and terracotta brick fragments from a number of locations, including Kings Quarry from which the stone for Drumlanrig Castle was extracted, and from the rivers Scaur and Nith. She then ground the samples by hand into pigments in her studio, and the resulting pigments comprise an array of reds, pinks and browns, directly reflecting the geology of the area whilst also evoking many other things for the artist - '*meat, blood, red wine, cocoa...*' Working on canvases of varying scales and shapes, she applies the earthen-coloured pigments in thin washes of colour in softly curved, sweeping and swirling abstract gestures.

In addition to her painting installation, Yelena also presents two textiles works in our downstairs spaces. The first of those references the extensive coniferous plantations that are a major feature of the working landscape in Dumfriesshire, producing as it does 30% of Scotland's annual timber harvest. Struck by the presence of the plantations in the landscape, as by the calming, cool and mossy shade of the trees in contrast to the aggressive, machine-driven process of their extraction as timber, Yelena has produced a monochromatic textile work shown downstairs that features an abstracted Spruce tree as its central motif.

Measuring 100x120cm, it has been hand-knitted for Yelena by knitter Irina Miloserdova, using a variation of Sanquhar Knit, a distinctive geometric knitting pattern that originated in the town of Sanquhar in Dumfries & Galloway in the 17th century, when hand-knitting was a thriving cottage industry there, and which continues there today through the efforts of A' The Airts and an active community initiative to revive the industry and safeguard the tradition.

Alongside this, Yelena has also included a limited edition jacquard woven throw. Titled *Hunting Scene with a Ray Cat* (2022), the design is taken from her initial sketch for a large jacquard woven stage curtain for Solway Hall community centre in Whitehaven, produced as part of a new public art commissions programme *Deep Time: Commissions for the Lake District Coast*. Taking inspiration from a 16th-century millefleurs tapestry *Hunting Scene with a Unicorn* held in the V&A collection in London, the mythological Ray Cat (representing a proposition by the philosophers Françoise Bastide

and Paolo Fabbri that a DNA-altered domestic cat could warn of nuclear waste in the future through changing colour when exposed to radiation) plays amidst a post-industrial landscape, which includes the remains of UK's first nuclear facility and references the Cumbrian mountains and the sea through merging zig-zag and wavy lines.

Yelena Popova was born in the Urals in the Soviet Union. She has lived in the UK for over twenty years, and lives and works in Nottingham. She works across a range of media, including painting, tapestry, video and installation. Her work has been included in *Slow Painting* curated by Martin Herbert for Hayward Gallery touring programme (2019) and in *Vitamin P3 (New Perspectives in Painting)* published by Phaidon (2016). She was shortlisted for the Arts Foundation Award in Painting and was included in *100 Painters of Tomorrow* published by Thames and Hudson (2014). Yelena has attended a number of residencies, among them Girton College, Cambridge; The Art House, Wakefield; CCA Andratx, Mallorca. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Landscapes of Power*, Philipp von Rosen, Cologne; *The Scholar Stones Project*, Holden Gallery, Manchester (2020) *Her Name is Prometheus*, L'étranger, London; *Townlets, After Image*, Nottingham Contemporary (2016) and *Unsensed*, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle (2015).