

Here we are, looking along the four walls of this Arch Hill art gallery, scrutinising these broken and continuous, raised and lowered lines of panels painted by Julia Morison- a rich variety of surrealism she has been absorbed with for over forty years now – and seeing multiple connections to various projects of the past, mixed with an appetite for obsessions that won't go away. As its title says, it's a miscellaneous collection, somewhat of a medley, that is for this occasion re-energised – compositionally and conceptually refreshed – and made coherent in a new manner.

On the lefthand wall and looking closely at Morison's imagery, we see the compressed blending of architectural surfaces and space of the artist's previous series *Decan* (1988) – but jammed now into a drawerlike shallow space – merged with the laboratory – tested bodies of *Gobsmack* and *Flabbergast* (2005). Here in this strange hall of science, with its squirting bags of fire, tubular bells, science apparatus, blue crystals, and rolling lines of cannon balls, we hear the crackle of electricity bouncing around cathode tubes, and straining paddle feet generating a wheel of energy. We witness Morison's free association within each rectangle, mingled later within this site-specific spatial arrangement in its fresh juxtapositions and unpredictable rectangular alignments.

Flippity flap-flop, upways, sideover, horizoperp, invertical and revershunt, locking together to make new blends of divided up panels, these portable, re-aligned rectangles are each divided into six equally sized parts, but with the resulting units not treated identically. It is a matrix that is only partially adhered to, so sometimes the structure dissolves, sections of the borders evaporating. We can see there are botanical specimens woven in; trumpet lilies and tendrils in the trellis. Or fauna. Lined up worms threaded to become banana-like centipede legs. Morison's panels allow abrupt changes in direction like twisting hopscotch or right-angular games of dominoes.

The rectangles can be vertical or horizontally aligned, singly isolated, or consistently lined up in groups butted together. In the groups of paintings, there is the question of overflow from the first into the next module and onward, with images that extend or morph horizontally across edges into adjacent zones. The gallery wall becomes a fertile garden for sprawling knotted roots; inky sap ejaculated. Ernst Haeckel¹. plants his shells, nuts and writhing hairy roots, Morison her spiky splashes. All in front of tile-like backdrops with shimmering decorative wall patterns and smaller more intricate triangular border friezes.

On the main end wall, fluffy animal carcasses loiter against grey and ochre tartan blankets, exuding domestic comfort but with plenty of creaturely agitation. We see stroking gnarled human fingers turn into feet. Impaled fleeces in their last agonised gasp.

Ten cards in a row an ongoing game of patience lined up along the wall. Black Jack against yourself. It is a linear Disney Rorschach test. Pluto, Goofy and perhaps Bugs Bunny. Ubi Werks provides the symmetry. Or from Loony Tunes, Tex Avery the rubber head parts, all hovering close with absurdly super-skinny forms. Each composition is vertical and compressed as if in a vice. Cartoon ears ebony eyebrows droopy moustaches wet canine noses languid tongues spiked jabbing tail jumbled jumped up and pitch-black whiskers swirling noir shoelaces wriggling blacked-in strings. Embracing too the swirling concentric and wobbling ovals of Gargantua's Petticoat (2006), but this time squashed sideways.

There is also an obvious and pervading entomological theme. Butterflies, bees and caddis flies, blended with op art moiré, tilted telescopic ovals in eyepopping configurations with some vertically disruptive flamingos thrown in. Botany too. A few squat plants, fecund with meandering petals or leaves, the occasional bulbously swelling cacti about to explode. There is also movement around the frieze borders, a lack of completion and thwarted regeneration.

Their 'unfinished' quality is brazen. Some sections are not 'coloured in', a compositional process as continuum, much like the hang itself.

These spindly vertical formations are notably intricate, you have to get very close to look. The result is a bodily intimacy. You have to peer in to detect small sections that float in the distance on the other side of the central configurations – in their compressed pictorial universes. Internal and complex constrictive zones dominate, not flat shallow expansive frames like on the other side of the room.

That contrast is apparent now. Light, airy and skybound on one side of the gallery space; heavy, dark greys and earthbound on the other.

Positioned at the street end of the righthand wall, we notice in the oblongs, receding cones, tornado funnels entangling dispersed ribbons; and protruding out from corners and midpoints, groping roots, bee stings, swivelling search lights, even squeezing corsets, a truly odd clustering of riotously incongruous sensations that above or alongside invade the next module.

Finally there is a group of separated and paired panels on the end wall behind the office. Just three. These graphically drawn images in the abrasive style of Ralph Steadman or Gerald Scarfe – inky slices of narrative – are stubby wormlike creatures. Sprouted hairy and scarred toes or pale crumbly calcified dog turds, they are furry pocked tubers that could also be blind, necklaced and wrinkled heads. Cruel, if not menacing, these portraits confront us before we leave. Openly sinister, they are a sobering (even gross) foil to the delicate and pale 'insect' configurations that seem celebratory and exuberant. Creepy and unnerving, the sluglike visages prepare for us an appropriate mood for the grim world outside the gallery, leading with all the panels a violent reality kick involving aleatory games and random shuffles, spread out on four walls but leaping about like an ignited concertinaed jumping-jack. Compositionally convulsive, *Omnium Gatherum* is still twitching.

John Hurrell, April 2016

1. Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel (German:1834 – 1919), biologist, naturalist, philosopher, physician, professor of comparative anatomy, an accomplished artist and illustrator. He invented new scientific terms and discovered, described and named thousands of new species. Some of these have never been found as he was also known to make great scientific leaps from available evidence.

