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“One dreams in front of a spring and the imagination discovers that water is the blood of the earth, that the earth has living depths.”<sup>1</sup>

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*

For Bachelard, to dream the world in solitude is both to bring it into being and to discover traces of it already present in the dreamer. In such a reverie, “two depths pair off, reverberate in echoes,”<sup>2</sup> each complementing and amplifying the other. In this vision of the creative moment, distinctions between artist and subject break down, affording access to a “cosmic image” that “invades the whole universe.”<sup>3</sup> It becomes difficult to disentangle the dreamer from their dream.

This way of thinking about creativity allows the work a measure of autonomy from the artist, while also remaining a product of their private reverie. This is exactly the position that Matt Arbuckle’s paintings occupy: his dyed-polyester abstractions operate in a border zone between randomness and control. Their streaks, stains and washes of colour reflect a process in which paint is allowed to seep throughout the fabric of the work, finding its own paths as it dries. The resulting mark-making language originates with the artist but is ultimately a kind of reverberation or echo, in Bachelard’s terms, rather than a direct consequence of the painter’s hand.

Arbuckle’s subject matter also demonstrates a concern with reciprocity and reflection. The works suggest landscape themes, their horizontal bands of colour stacked one atop another like layers of clouds or geographical strata, describing a liminal expanse where soil, water and sky bleed into and destabilise one another. However, there is also a decidedly introspective element to Arbuckle’s practice, a sense of looking inward rather than out towards the horizon. He describes his work in terms of narrative, specifically the recalling or reframing of memories as a mode of meditation and expression. To this end, his paintings have a palimpsestic quality, in that they document, retain or echo the places and times in which they were made. The current series, painted on the cracked, uneven terrain of the artist’s concrete driveway, serve to map and apostrophise this domestic territory. The landscape they chart is both a real, physical space and a dreamed or imagined one, possessing elements of both interior and exterior—annexed to the home, part of the quotidian furniture of the mind.

Indeed, domesticity is a crucial touchstone for Arbuckle’s practice. He refers to the intimist painter Edouard Vuillard as an important influence, suggesting a concern with placing the artistic gesture in the context of the everyday. For Henri Lefebvre, a critique of the everyday is also “a critique of sleep and dreams by wakefulness (and vice versa), and a critique of the real by the imaginary.”<sup>4</sup> There is a sense in Lefebvre’s words that the everyday contains within it a reflection of its opposite, that the visionary products of creativity are inseparable from the mundane world of domestic routine. This is how Arbuckle’s painting interrogates the everyday, teasing out strands of dream, memory and fantasy from the solid physicality of the lived environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, vol. 2: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2002), 19.