

*We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.*¹

Marie Le Lievre's paintings are perceptual interlocutors. They are spirited entities that participate in shaping and mediating our sensory experiences. Le Lievre works within self-defined categories and series, each with their own characteristics. *Loot isms* includes new work from Le Lievre's 'House', 'Stacked', 'Tomes', and 'Paraphernalia' series, and paintings from the new 'Loot' series. The colours, forms, layers, and textures of each possess distinct identities. A significant part of her work as a painter lies in the experience of working with the medium in a process of discovery, engaging tactility and introspection. Each painting is a "dialogue between [her] private inscape and the public world."² In turn, the paintings engage the viewer in dialogue and evoke a personal connection, inviting us to explore the nature of our perceptions, and encouraging a sense of something greater beyond ourselves, something that might be unknowable. As perceptual interlocutors, what the paintings reveal is between them and the beholder.

Le Lievre paints because she believes in "its relevance as a medium given to a language of feeling," she is "interested in painting...which communicates and soothes our life anxieties..."³ Her process, which involves building up layers of paint and then selectively removing or revealing underlying strata, mirrors the complex interplay of conscious and unconscious processes that constitute us as humans. When we perceive the world or our internal states, we don't just process information; we have rich, qualitative experiences. Our consciousness is fundamentally shaped by our perceptions, which give rise to qualia - the unique, subjective experiences that make up our inner world. As painter Jo Bertini describes, "you have a prism...it's multi-dimensional and it's multi-experiential and emotional, and that prism is you."⁴ This prism-like nature of our consciousness refracts our experiences into qualia. The blueness of the sky, the character of a musical note, the sensation of warmth, or the joy of reuniting with a friend are all examples of qualia. Our perceptions, transformed into qualia through this personal prism, shape the texture of our conscious reality.

In his book *Being You*, neuroscientist Anil Seth describes qualia as complex phenomena deeply connected to our bodily states and personal histories. Experienced from a first-person perspective, they are only directly accessible to the person experiencing them. Qualia make up what art historian Ernst Gombrich called 'the beholders share.' Just as qualia represent our personal experiences of sensory input, the beholder's share emphasises the viewer's active role in interpreting and experiencing artwork, suggesting that our conscious perception of art is as much a product of our minds as it is of the artwork itself.

The neuro and cognitive sciences have shown a complex relationship between unconscious neural processes and subjective experiences. Our brains constantly process vast amounts of information below the threshold of consciousness, filtering and interpreting sensory inputs, memories, and emotions. These unconscious

¹ Anaïs Nin, *Seduction of the Minotaur*. Denver, Swallow, 1961.

² <https://marielelievre.com/>

³ Marie Le Lievre in Andrew Paul Wood, *Drawing Aside the Veil*. Artnews New Zealand, Summer 2017. <https://marielelievre.com/>

⁴ Jo Bertini, *Talking with Painters* podcast. <https://talkingwithpainters.com>

processes shape and influence our conscious perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, often without our awareness. Similarly, Le Lievre's perceptual interlocutors engage the beholder's perception in a process of discovery and interpretation, becoming part of our ongoing engagement with our surroundings.

After visiting Le Lievre to see her work in progress, I have an enduring recollection of her mention of pouring layers of paint onto paint in a wet-on-wet technique. In her large paintings, Le Lievre works with the canvas laid flat, pouring and manipulating the paint with her hands in a process that is physical and intuitive. Her process involves both the application of multiple layers left to dry between applications and wet-on-wet. This "layering and veiling of translucent and opaque oil colours builds volume," creating a sense of depth and movement within the composition.⁵ Le Lievre's description of the wet-on-wet technique was captivating. I imagine her guiding the paint onto the surface, knowing what kind of action and momentum is required to manipulate the paint just the right amount for it to go somewhere interesting. The layers of wet paint bleed into each other creating organic forms. Overnight, the paint continues to move and settle as it slowly dries; in the morning, the painting will look different. Not only is this interaction of paint and the chemical processes at work fascinating in and of itself, I see a parallel in Seth's use of 'neuronal wetware'. Neuronal wetware refers to the brain's organic, flexible, and adaptable structure, highlighting how our neural networks are continuously responding to stimuli and experiences. In the paintings, especially in works like *Hemming Loot*, I see the branching forms of bleeding paint as neurons reaching out to release or receive the signal of neurotransmitters across the gap of the synapse.

Painting itself has always been a language and means of expression admired by Le Lievre who experiences it as "a journey" where "you never really know what's going to happen. You can control many aspects and make good with the unpredictable occurrences too. Just like life."⁶ Before the paintings reach us as beholders, they have also been perceptual interlocutors for Le Lievre, engaging her in a dynamic call-and-response. As for the beholder, Le Lievre wants us to be curious about the nature of the work, and "for the painting to invite an emotional response and multiple interpretations."⁷ Seth believes that powerful paintings leave space "for the observer's visual system to perform its interpretative work."⁸ Le Lievre's paintings have that space. They offer a form of embodied philosophy, inviting us to explore the nature of our perceptions.

- Charlotte Huddleston, 2024

⁵ Marie Le Lievre in A.P Wood, *Drawing Aside the Veil*

⁶ Marie Le Lievre in A.P Wood, *Drawing Aside the Veil*

⁷ Marie Le Lievre in A.P Wood, *Drawing Aside the Veil*

⁸ Anil Seth, *Being You: A New Science of Consciousness*. Dutton, 2021.