

Marie Le Lievre's newest work presses so insistently against the boundary between painting and drawing that those categories begin to feel inadequate as the artist pushes the limits of what abstraction and figuration can do. Oil medium and pigment remain, but the delicate fringes and scaffolds of line that began to emerge around 2023 now assume a far bolder presence in charcoal.

Le Lievre uses charcoal on and alongside the oil surface. "I love that it is a natural material that offers a matte finish in contrast to the layered oil," she says. "Its use is gestural, a direct antidote to layered and laboured oils. Charcoal brings a grunginess to the luxurious oil finish. In contrast to colour, it obscures or buries it. It is much more dominant in this work because the oil painting, once contained within the picture frame, once bound to figurative elements, then seeping to the edges, has saturated my visual field."

This asemic scribbling appears like hurried notation set against the slow organic logic of layered, merging and bleeding colour and translucency. In some works it obscures, even obliterates, the soft-bodied pigment beneath; yet it also clarifies a longstanding process in Le Lievre's practice: a negotiation between organic impulse and restraint, where poured oil is granted its own unruly natural agency before being tested by interruption, contained, veiled, reworked and revised.

The resulting image hovers in a dimensionless space between abstraction and figuration. Here, notation, bodily gesture and amorphous form meet and contest one another. These deeply layered readings reflect Le Lievre's study of psychology and criminology, and the therapeutic qualities of painting, recovery and maturity. The effect is less a rigid, preplanned composition than a shifting field of tension. That seems inevitable in a process as physical as Le Lievre's, where each gesture records the body at work, the extent of its reach and the limits of its motion: pigment poured, spread in sweeping movements by hand, countered by the tight, repetitive pressure of charcoal.

Concerned always with hiding and revealing, these paintings stage a dialogue between private inscape and public surface. They feel less like resolved pictures than perceptual encounters: layered fields that draw the viewer into the same oscillation between discovery and obscurity that structures their making. If anything, they are even more rigorously poetic for it, in something of the way a Cy Twombly drawing can be.

"Here," says Le Lievre, "the slightly volumetric, layered and composed colour forms support the expressive, gestural, almost manic marks. These new works feel like psychological mind maps. Charcoal offers a burnt matte finish, a kind of scarring to the oil. They have evolved from earlier works, where charcoal brought a sense of immediacy or abstracted written word, toward something more poetic or prayerful: a layering, a duality, a sense of presence with the unknown aspects of life. The depth of colour, its layering and merging. It suggests time, emotion and what lies beneath."

Le Lievre's work shares a concern with the history of ideas and with what lies between the lines, yet it remains grounded in psychological and sociological inquiry. These surfaces stage a tension between chaos and order, or between freedom and containment, with paint performing inside artist-defined limits. In that sense, the paintings probe hidden structures of feeling, behaviour and perception as much as they invoke Platonic order, the Tao, Jungian archetypes, the Kabbalah and Biblical mystery.

None of this diminishes the sensuality of oil or the force of Le Lievre's luminous colour. It sharpens both, making those eruptions of brilliance feel all the more precious and intense.

“The new body of paintings expresses and perhaps invites an appreciation of emotional attunement and a consideration of why colour is obscured. There are many questions that the work could ask. There remains, too, a series of open questions: Is charcoal writing ruinous or profound when it can never be known? Is all art an expression of the unknown? What is sabotage? What is fear? What is confession, or daily inventory? What is prayer? What is agnostic? What is true for you and not for others?

Philosopher Bruno Latour calls this *iconoclash*, the moment when an image or object is transformed in ways that make it impossible to tell whether the act is destructive, creative, or something in between.

Le Lievre's new paintings exist in just such a zone of uncertainty, yet they also carry a pronounced sense of certainty, bravery and determination: charcoal and oil, for all their different qualities, prove strikingly compatible, certain in their difference.

Andrew Paul Wood, June 2026