

John Noel Smith

John Noel Smith
The Fold



Hillsboro Fine Art
20th Century & Contemporary Art



Preface

John Noel Smith's work must be viewed and heard. The sheer physicality of paint with a discerning use of colour and intelligence of execution often requires second and third viewings. In an interview with Patrick T. Murphy, Smith refers to *Five Spaces TSSST* (1999) the five-panelled work, as a quintet of instruments playing the one score. Smith's work is in fact symphonic. Individual motifs (particular to Smith perhaps the leitmotif) interrupt planes or movements of contrasting rigour within carefully honed constructs Smith refers to a 'flotilla' of ideas that form a *Gesamtbild*. I am reminded of the infamous Wagnerian ideology of *Gesamtkunstwerk*; most noted to opera as a synthesis of artforms to produce a harmonized whole, but more significantly here, the term directly translates as 'great united work'.

Solstice was first introduced to the work of John Noel Smith in *Substrata*, an exhibition curated by Ciarán Bennett featuring Charles Tyrrell and Sean Shanahan in 2007. A relationship with Solstice has developed over the years and we are delighted to partner Hillsboro Fine Art in the exhibition *The Fold* that spans our two galleries.

Belinda Quirke
Director, Solstice Arts Centre

It is always a great pleasure to experience a new series of work from John Noel Smith; unfailingly his paintings are a masterful renewed and coherent articulation of his artistic concerns. With *The Fold*, elements familiar to us from earlier periods are carried forward as part of his formidable armory, powerful discordance and quiescent fields, colours bold and cool, assured visceral creations of unique and vital beauty.

It is a great privilege to partner Solstice Arts Centre on this exhibition; a special word of gratitude to Solstice's esteemed director and curator Belinda Quirke for her professional approach, encouragement and enthusiasm for this project.

John Daly
Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin



Painting Time

I doubt that Giotto, Bellini, Vermeer or Jacques Louis David, each in his own way an innovator, cared much one way or the other if those who viewed their work had anything like an instructed interest in the techniques and technicalities of painting. Up to the end of the 19th century (and I am speaking here purely about the Western tradition) technique, the intellectual processes that guided hand and eye in the execution of a painting, was the reserved interest of the painter himself and of an instructed minority of connoisseurs.

The point, if I may put it somewhat simply, was to please the patron and give pleasure to the accidental viewer in the end result, the trophy object. If, as in the case of David for instance, the iconographic choices lent themselves to a political proposition, that was still an outer-directed result of a venture begun in an inward impulse that remained private to the painter and to an instructed few.

With Fauvism, Cubism, the Blaue Reiter school and a host of other early 20th century movements there came a decisive shift; the pleasure we are meant to take from painting, in painting, was to incorporate an instructed pleasure not just in the *what* (the finished product) but in the *how* of painting.

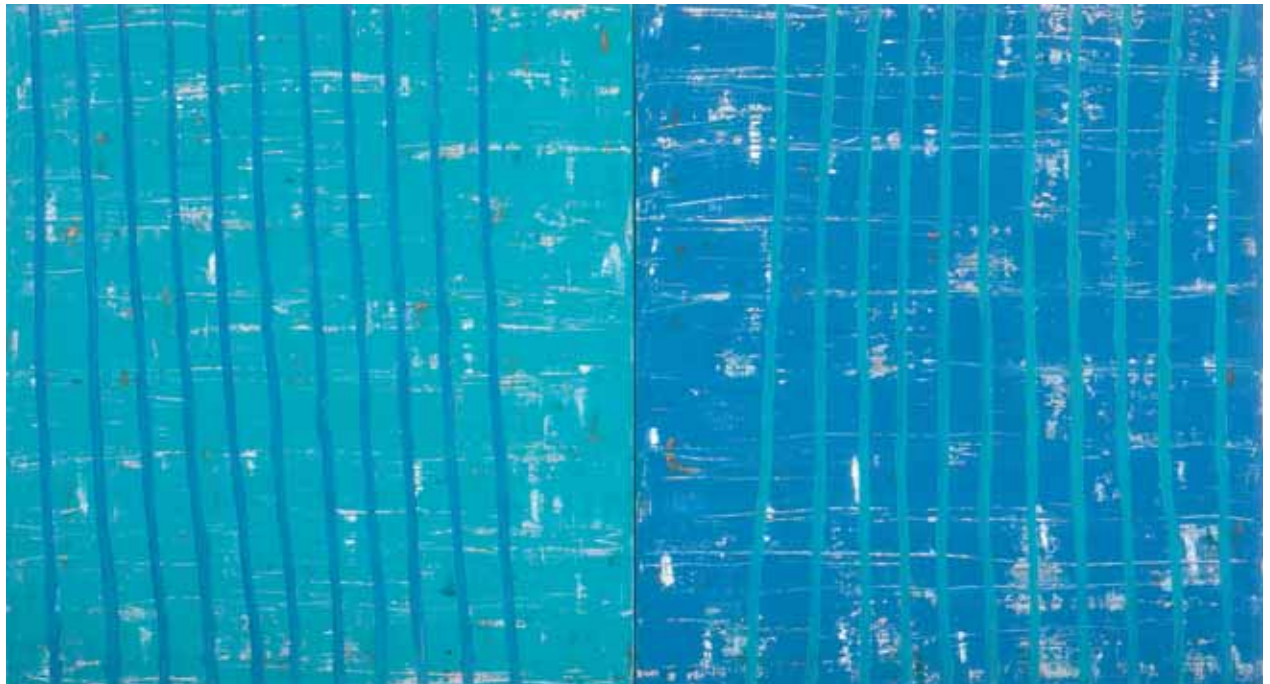
After this rupture, in order to extract the full aesthetic value from the encounter with a painting, the viewer can no longer be content with the passive, more or less instructed, absorption of the work presented to sight. The viewer now is expected to engage with the mental, intuitive and intellectual struggles of the painter as she or he engages with the process of painting. Put another way, the painting on the wall ceases to be an object, becomes instead a nexus in a process that never stops flowing, backwards and forwards in time. The analogy, however partial, is with a freeze-frame for a movie without beginning or end.

I can put this another way: the painting now is not in even a partial sense a painting *of* something else, a re-presentation; the painting is a thing in itself, its outward-directed references part of its constitution, but its inwardness equally an intrinsic element in

its meaning. The balance is held only if and when we consent to view the painting as a thing in itself, sufficient to itself and to its moment. This led to a view that the painting, to co-opt a phrase from Wittgenstein, is all that is the case, self contained in a space where time has stopped. But there is another way of looking at painting after this moment, that is, to see the painting as a point of arrival in a process — a point of arrival and also a departure.

In John Noel Smith's paintings, the two dimensions of the canvas must sustain themselves in an avowedly three-dimensional space, in the fourth dimension of time, and in the fifth dimension, neither space nor time, that is the domain of thought.

To say that this is a complex process is a considerable understatement. This is, in part, because the overwhelming visual immediacy of the contemporary world, infinitely ramified by technology, has trained us not so much to look at things as to snatch at things, like so many collectors or hoarders, grabbing images from the flood, meaning to consider them later, at our 'leisure'. A fool's intention, of course, since the overwhelming succession of images, the flood, is so powerful now that we rarely, if ever, re-visit images at a later moment. That is no longer how most of us live in time now, we can barely keep our heads above water, seduced and bewildered by the torrent that sweeps us ever onward. These paintings are not about the quick hit, an immediate, assimilable image.



Omphalos (Diptych)

oil on canvas, 1993, 180 x 320 cm

There is something heroic about Smith's work that I find extraordinarily attractive. He is completely immersed in paint and painting, for one thing; he doggedly refuses, with very rare exceptions, to make paintings of anything, as we might ordinarily understand that term. A spare, even terse, handful of motifs, marks, call them what you will, recurs over and over in his work — short lines, blocks of lines imitating cross-hatch, small and large blocks of saturated colour, usually in chain association, fields of mixed colour punctuated by emphatic dabs with a medium-sized brush — and he works in series, each series it seems to me a fresh return to, and then a departure from, what may have seemed exhausted in the previous series. The brush marks neither hide nor draw attention to themselves, and yet every mark, every passage of painting, speaks quietly but emphatically of the human hand and heart and mind that made this thing you are looking at. Smith politely sidesteps the egoistic bravura of Abstract Expressionism, with its slightly queasy emphasis on the artist as culture hero, in favour of a different *kind* of presence in the work. Time spent with one of these paintings evokes a curious kind of mimetic impulse; I find myself wanting to be that man with the brush in his hand, making this very painting, like that character in Borges who aspires to write the *Quixote*. I want to have in my self the exact sense of time passing, the exact conversation with materiality, with paint and history and the passing moment, that the artist was having while making this work.

Red Lacerations (small)
oil on linen, 1994, 40 x 30 cm

It's an uncanny seduction, made possible, perhaps inevitable, because Smith is clearly in love with paint, the materiality of it, the plastic and viscous and redolent and exciting fact of paint itself. Something of this love of paint for its own sake ensnares the viewer, and through this portal we step inside Smith's ongoing battle with lucidity. There are, it seems to me, two distinct impulses in his work: one drive is towards dominance, where the very achievement of the work, as a singleton or in a series, is that it is complete in itself, presents itself as a resonating presence that is forever tied to its own ground. The second impulse, the one he seems to be following

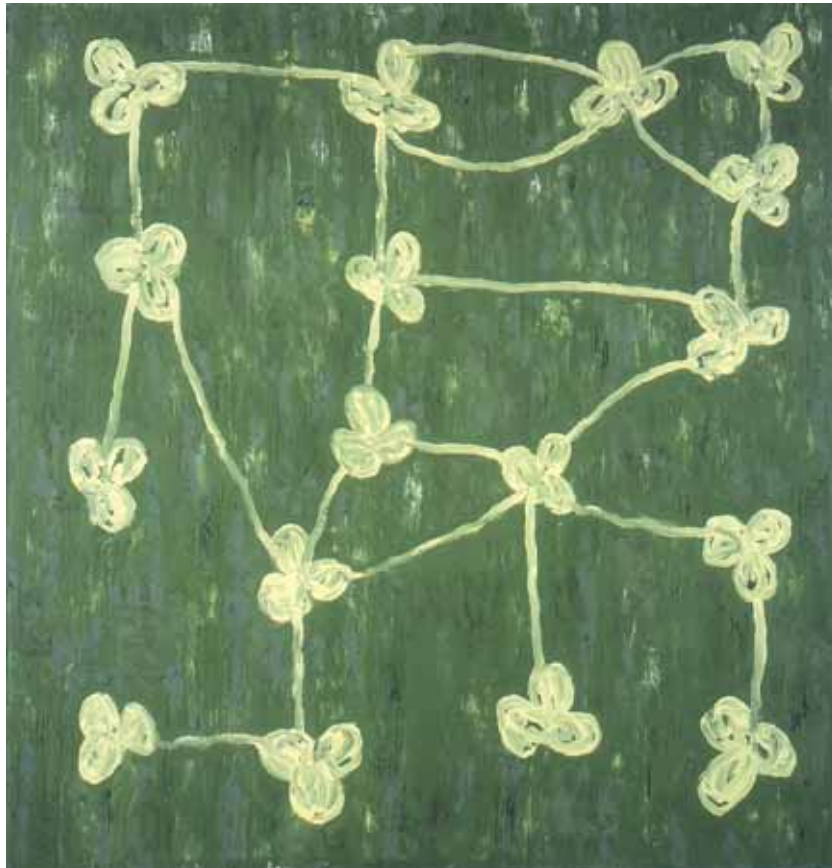


at present, is to set up a series of oppositions or counterposed forces — form and colour, weight and a certain tendency towards floating, the scraped-back ground and the gestural brushmark — inside the temporary field that happens to be the given canvas.

In the former case, the viewer tends to pursue a kind of achievable satisfaction, the satisfaction perhaps of having worked out what it is the painter was hoping the work might achieve. In the second case, where the vagaries of time are more in play, we are encouraged to find in the painting not so much a

resolution as a respite, a temporary but very satisfying island on which to rest before plunging on into the torrent of being and becoming. An example of this first tendency: *Knots, green* (1997), oil on canvas, 240 x 230 cm; of the second, *Pandect II* (2009), oil on canvas, 120 x 240 cm from the *Pandect* series.

Whichever force is dominant in the work at a given time, one of the constants is the reassuring sense, to be gained from expending time in the presence of the work, that there is a cool intelligence, a presence in thought, governing what is being done here.



Knots, green

oil on canvas, 1997, 240 x 230 cm



Pandect II

oil on canvas, 2009, 120 x 240 cm

And one thing more: to immerse yourself in time, the fourth dimension, is to be offered the opportunity of co-habiting with the painter in the fifth dimension, the dimension of thought. I have the strongest sense, spending time with these paintings, that whatever is prompted to my thinking self by

the experience is congruent with what comes to thought for the painter as he works through the act of painting towards, not the finished so much as the sufficient work —that place where the work singing itself in colour and form, and the worker singing the act of making, are one and the same event.

Theo Dorgan
Dublin, 2011

Poet, prose writer, editor, translator and radio and television presenter Theo Dorgan is a member of Aosdána; his recent poetry collections from Dedalus Press include *Greek* (2010) and *What This Earth Cost Us* (2008) and a prose work *Time On The Ocean, A Voyage from Cape Horn to Cape Town* (New Island, 2010).

The Fold

oil on canvas, 2011
60 x 120 cm



The Fold

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



The Fold

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



The Fold

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



The Fold

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



The Fold

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



The Fold Cluster

oil on canvas, 2011
180 x 360 cm



The Fold Icon

oil on canvas, 2011
180 x 360 cm



The Fold Triangular

oil on canvas, 2011
180 x 360 cm



The Fold Cluster

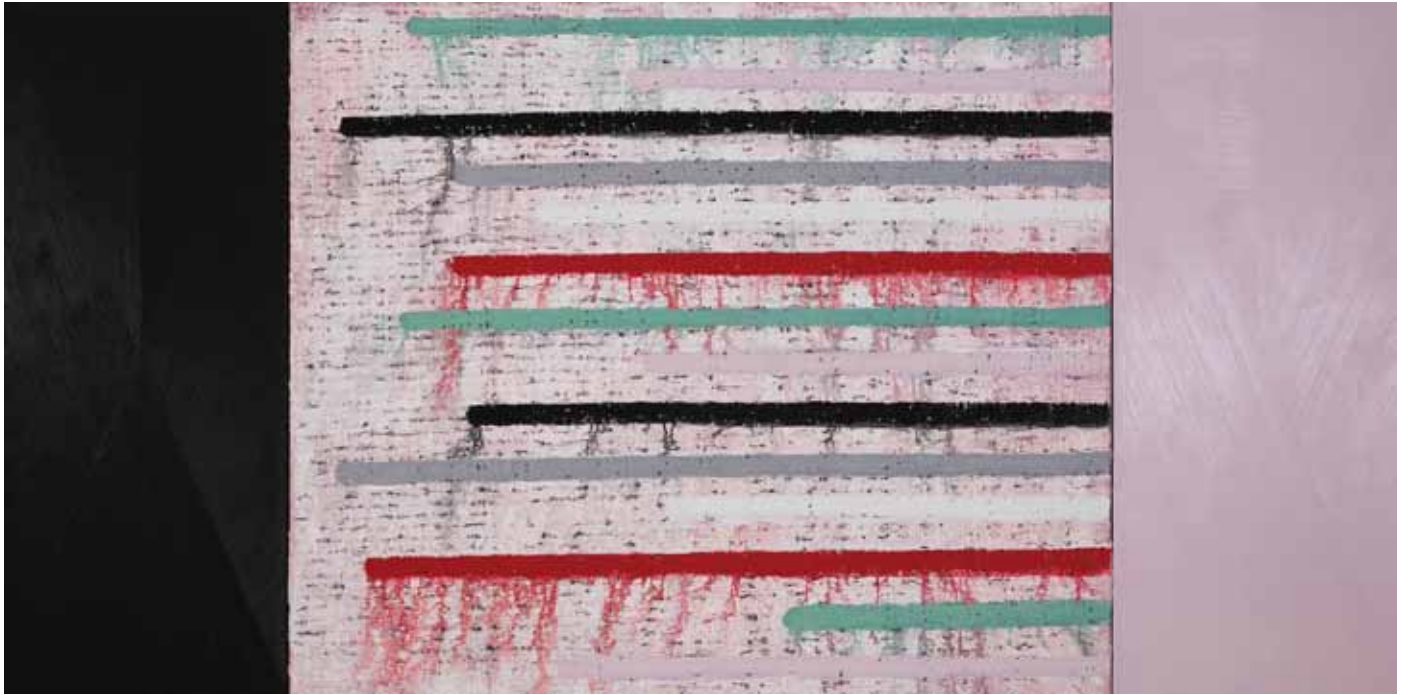
oil on canvas, 2011
180 x 360 cm



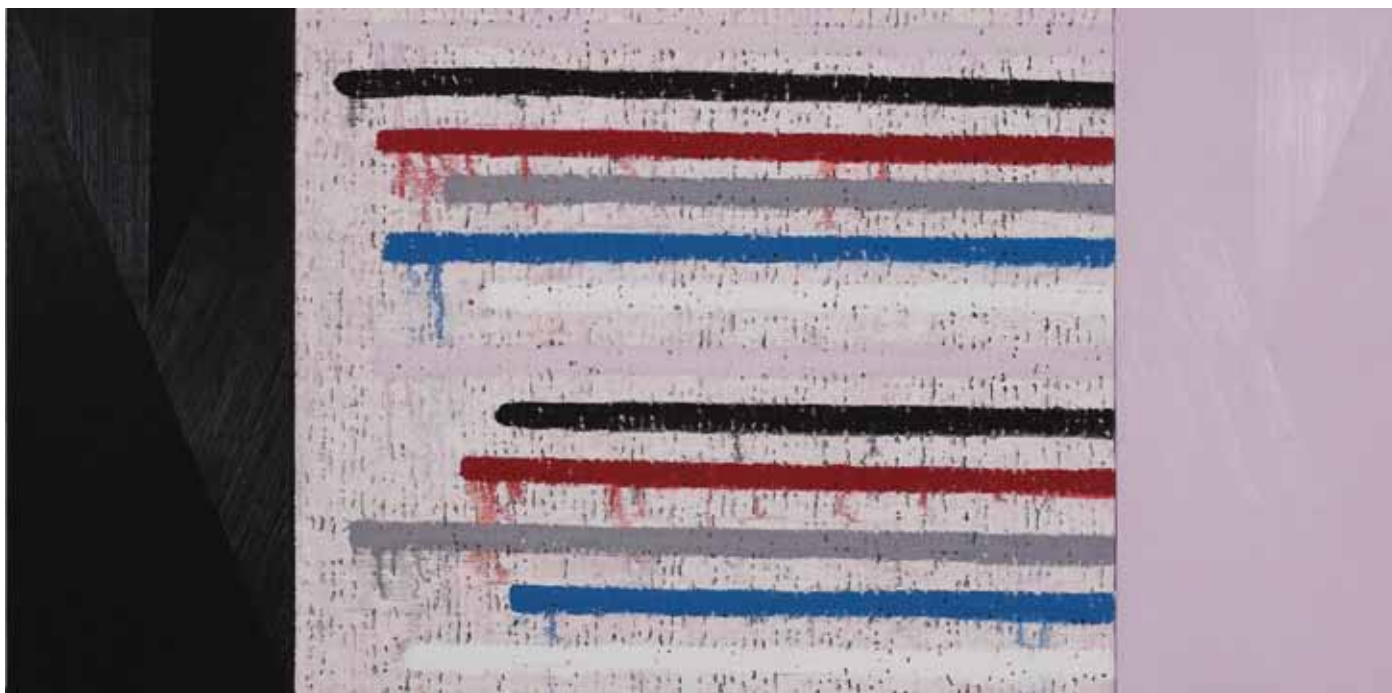


The Fold Linear

oil on canvas, 2011
60 x 120 cm



The Fold Linear
oil on canvas, 2011
120 x 240 cm



The Fold Linear

oil on canvas, 2011
90 x 180 cm



The Fold Linear
oil on canvas, 2011
60 x 120 cm



The Fold Linear

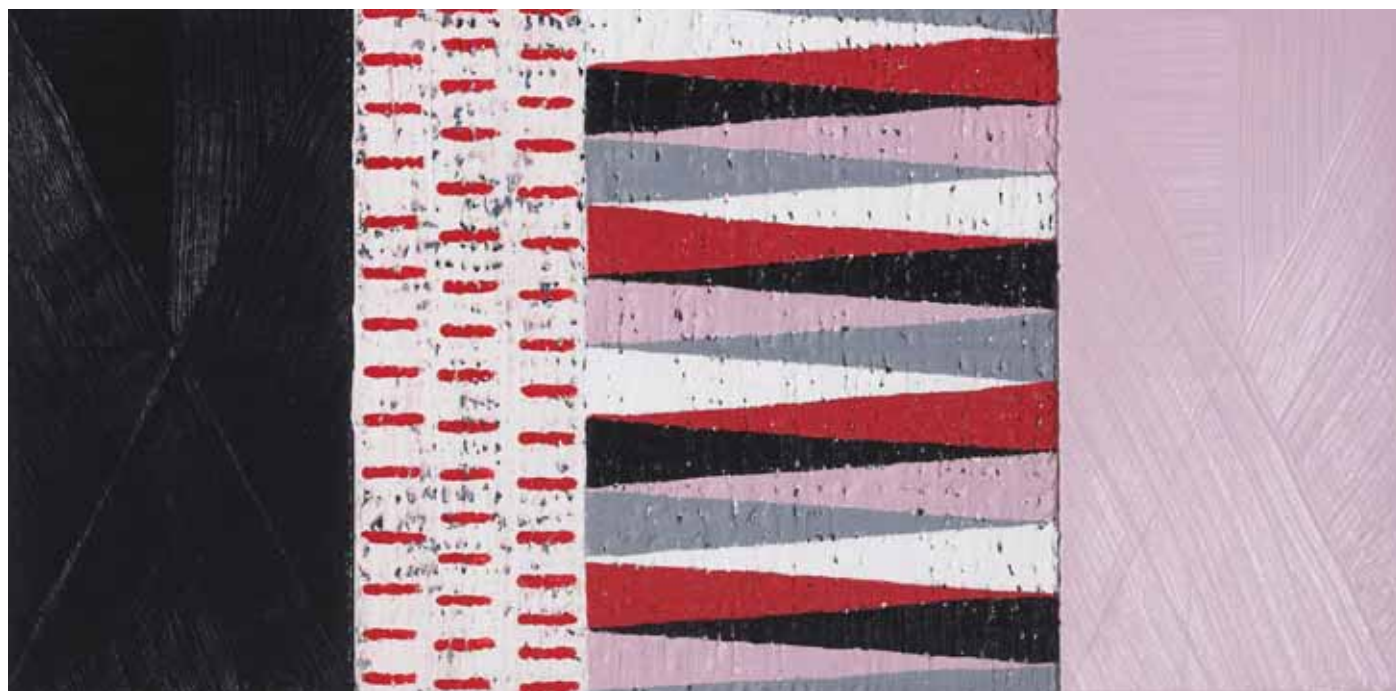
oil on canvas, 2011
60 x 120 cm



The Fold Linear
oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm

The Fold Ogham

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



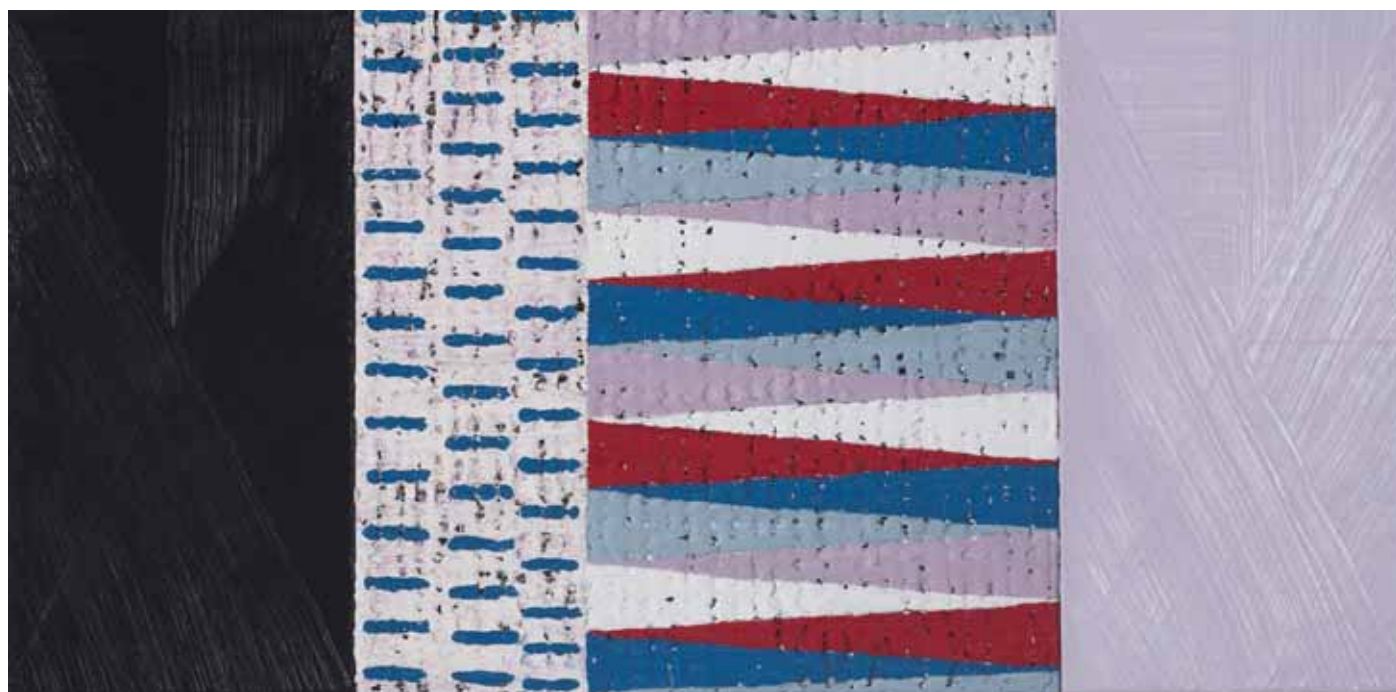
The Fold Ogham

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



The Fold Ogham

oil on canvas, 2011
30 x 60 cm



The Fold Triangular

oil on canvas, 2011
20 x 40 cm





Born in Dublin in 1952, John Noel Smith attended Dun Laoghaire School of Art followed by postgraduate studies in Berlin. He lived in Berlin for twenty two years where he was an important member of its vibrant art community, returning to Ireland in 2002. He has exhibited internationally since 1980 and is a member of Aosdána. Long regarded as one of Ireland's foremost contemporary painters, this artist's work forms part of important public, private and corporate collections across the world.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 *John Noel Smith and Anthony Caro*, Waterhouse and Dodd, London, England
- 2011 *John Noel Smith*, Fendersky Gallery, Belfast, Northern Ireland
- 2011 *The Fold*, Solstice Arts Centre, Navan, Ireland
- 2011 *The Fold*, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin
- 2010 *Studies in Paint: Jonathan Lasker and John Noel Smith*, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin
- 2009 *Pandect Series*, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin
- 2008 *New Paintings*, J. Cacciola Gallery, Chelsea, New York, USA
- 2007 *Liliform*, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin
- 2004 *Green On Red* Gallery, Dublin
- 2002 Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) Gallery, Dublin
- 2002 Royal Hibernian Academy, Gallagher Gallery, ten-year survey exhibition, Nissan Prize
- 2002 *Green on Red* Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
- 1999 Galerie Leger, Malmö, Sweden



The Fold Triangular

oil on canvas, 2011, 20 x 40 cm

| | | | |
|------|---|------|---|
| 1999 | Galerie Grosskinski & Brümmer, Karlsruhe, Germany | 1991 | Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin, Germany |
| 1998 | Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin, Germany | 1991 | Galleri Lars Bohman, Stockholm, Sweden |
| 1996 | Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin | 1990 | Royal Hospital Kilmainham, (Irish Museum of Modern Art), Dublin |
| 1996 | Galerie Grosskinski & Brümmer, Karlsruhe, Germany | 1989 | Galerie Eleni Koroneou, Athens, Greece |
| 1996 | Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin, Germany | 1989 | Galleri Clemens, Aarhus, Denmark |
| 1994 | Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin, Germany | 1989 | Galleri Lars Bohman (Galleri 16), Stockholm, Sweden |
| 1993 | DIN Haus Der Normung, Berlin, Germany | 1988 | Galerie Folker Skulima, Berlin, Germany |
| 1992 | Galerie Leger, Malmö, Sweden | 1987 | Galerie Van Alom, Berlin, Germany |

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- | | | | |
|--------|--|--------|---|
| 2011 | Inaugural Exhibition, St Patrick's Hospital, Dublin, Ireland | 1998/9 | Small Works, Green On Red Gallery, Dublin |
| 2009 | Works on Paper, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin, Ireland | 1994 | Galerie Neher, Essen, Germany Kunst in Europa, 16 Artists in Germany |
| 2008 | The Painted Path, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin, Ireland | 1993/4 | Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin, Germany |
| 2007 | Substrata, Solstice Arts Centre, Navan, Ireland | 1992 | Galerie Biemolds, Groningen, Holland |
| 2006 | Inaugural, Hillsboro Fine Art, Dublin | 1991 | Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin, Germany |
| 2004/5 | Inaugural exhibition, Berlinische Galerie, state museum for modern art, photography and architecture, Berlin Germany | 1989 | Berliner Tagebuch, Travelling Exhibition, Germany/Spain |
| 2004 | In the Time of Shaking: Irish Artists for Amnesty International, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin | 1986 | Galleri Clemens, Aarhus, Denmark |
| 2003 | Colour chart, Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast | 1986 | Galerie Folker Skulima, Berlin |
| 2002 | Works On Paper 2002, Green On Red Gallery, Dublin | 1985 | Galerie Leger, Malmö, Sweden |
| 1999 | Contemporary Works on Paper, Green On Red Gallery, Dublin | | |



The Fold Triangular

oil on canvas, 2011, 20 x 40 cm

SELECTED ART FAIRS

2011 Vue, Charles Gallagher Gallery, RHA,
Dublin, Ireland
2009 ID & A, Royal Dublin Society, Ireland
2008 ID & A, Royal Dublin Society, Ireland
2007 Hillsboro Fine Art at Art-Miami, Florida, USA
2003 London Art Fair, UK
2002 Armory Show, New York, USA

1999 Art 1999, Green On Red Gallery, Chicago,
USA
1986 Kunstmesse Basel, Galleri Lars Bohman
(Galleri 16), Stockholm
1983 London Contemporary Art Fair, Galleri Lars
Bohman, Stockholm

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Cover: ***The Fold*** (detail)

oil on canvas, 2011, 180 x 360 cm





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