

## **Clare Burnett and Claude Vergez: INTERWOVEN Chromatic Conversations**

### **Javier Pes**

Claude Vergez says, “colour is stuff.” Her swirling, gestural but controlled paintings of twisting, tangled lines on a vibrant background blend illusion with abstraction. Colour is intrinsic and never superficial in Clare Burnett’s enigmatic and yet strangely familiar sculptures. As ever, she creates specific objects that are hard to pin down.

The artists’ paintings and sculptures, a lucky 13, play off each other, inviting closer inspection. “Interwoven: Chromatic Conversations,” feels like an artistic call and response between acquaintances. The saturated blues in particular sing in the space.

Behind the paintings and sculptures, created by both artists over the past two years and brought into dialogue at the Hansard Studio Gallery, lies a creative friendship that began some 20 years ago. The artists first met when they had studios in the same building in Acton, West London. This intimate exhibition in a new gallery and workspace in Shepherd’s Bush, their first double hander, is a fortuitous reunion. It has come together after an invitation from another artist and mutual friend from their days in Acton.

Vergez and Burnett’s paths cross again in this exhibition. On show are very different works by two artists who share affinities not just of colour but also approach. Both artists talk of works that have not survived the journey from studio to gallery. “The hang was all about editing,” Vergez says of her left out paintings, which resonates with Burnett, referring to pieces that she has toppled, set aside or reconfigured.

Happily, paintings such as Vergez’s *Winding Green* (2022) and *Spiralling* (2021) and Burnett’s sculptures, such as *No Smoke Without Fire* (2022) and *Watery Wealth* (2022) have passed the artists’ acid test.

Burnett describes how through her work she strives to build relationships by scanning for links everywhere. What may have started life as a chimney pot now resembles a sentinel with still a hint of a finial on a flamboyant building by Gaudí.

There seems to be something underlying the cluster of gourd-like shapes that form High Water Line (2019) but it is impossible to say exactly what each element might once have been. Best known for transforming found objects and unlikely materials, Burnett obscures and embellishes with strange protuberances but there remains something about them that hints of their former selves, which is part of their power.

Vergez's paintings recall Paul Klee's famous quote that a line is a dot that went for a walk. She draws and paints a line that has gone for a winding walk, ravelled and unravelled without getting into a knot. Some are free form, albeit contained within a rectangle of the canvas, while others are more regular, such as the hexagons of A Doorway #2, hinting at mathematical patterns or Islamic carpets. She talks of striving for something contemplative. Following a pattern's changes of direction feels almost therapeutic.

"Interwoven" is an apt title for a show featuring works by two artists who share a sensibility about colour, form and space, Vergez illusionistic, Burnett physical. In their own words, Vergez's paintings are about "minimal excess." Burnett's creative practice is all about "excess minimalism", she says. They strike a fine balance between simplicity and complexity, accidental and controlled by a plan. Like the best paintings and sculptures, they are original and hard to pigeonhole. There is much to enjoy.

Javier Pes, editor and arts writer