

## Art Histories Collide in Emma McIntyre's Sublime Abstractions

Chris Sharp's new LA gallery opens with a show of abstract paintings inspired by art-historical movements from impressionism to 1970s performance art

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BY FANNY SINGER IN REVIEWS | 23 FEB 21



The new Los Angeles gallery of curator and writer Chris Sharp – whose Mexico City space, Lulu, has enjoyed a cult following since its 2013 debut – is the first commercial art venue I've visited in months since the pandemic. The inaugural exhibition is a small show of colourful, abstract paintings by the young New Zealand artist, Emma McIntyre. As I was surveying McIntyre's canvases, Sharp mentioned to me that the paintings had preceded the idea of the gallery itself. His living room had originally been the intended venue but, as McIntyre developed the work, it became evident that domestic dimensions would not suffice. A white cube – with a vivid azure façade reminiscent of Mexico City's palettes – was required out of spatial necessity. It gave the gallerist an excuse to create a setting in which he might showcase his considered, peripatetic approach to curating, presenting the kinds of artists largely absent from the commercial scene.



Emma McIntyre, *If there is light that has weight*, 2021, oil and oil stick on linen, 183 × 163 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles

In McIntyre's show, 'Pour plenty on the worlds', there is a literal abundance of pouring at play in her arsenal of techniques, which includes spilling buckets of thinned pigment onto canvas in the tradition of Helen Frankenthaler. But there's much more going on: McIntyre combines oil stick, Flashe, acrylic, oil, pastel and printing in the creation of the diverse formal worlds that make up her universe. The works are beautiful but, for anyone literate in art history, the temptation to parse through her worlds holds incredible allure.

Sharp reveals that McIntyre refers to the large canvas *If there is light that has weight* (2021) as 'her [Pierre] Bonnard', an association that had already formed in my mind. But some works also have an echo of James Whistler's coruscating firework picture, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket* (c.1875), particularly McIntyre's *Untitled* (2020): a dark, bluish canvas with radiant swaths of greens and reds. Her style of abstraction is familiar – a magpie-like collection of gestures – but there's enough spirit and skill in the *gestalt* to subvert the question of derivation.



Emma McIntyre, *Fuses*, 2020, oil, oil stick, Flashe and acrylic on linen, 142 × 163 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles

During the isolation of lockdown, McIntyre was emboldened to try body-printing: her own naked frame ghosts in the bottom-left-hand corner of a lush painting called *Bathers* (2020). A vivid canvas from 2020 – titled *Fuses* in homage to Carolee Schneemann’s controversially coital 1967 video work of the same name – is an acknowledgment of McIntyre’s debts. Schneemann’s work was seminal not just for its feminist assertion of the female body – offering depictions of her own sexual acts – but for the palimpsestic quality of the footage. Schneemann variously cut, painted, erased and abraded the film to combine the energies of the body with the materiality of the celluloid. The same could be said of McIntyre’s work, in which the dissolving and recombining of forms, and collisions of transparencies and densities, are constantly at play.

*Fierce Jewels* (2020) – one of two smaller, lapidary canvases – reminded me of Claude Monet’s *Impression, Sunrise* (1872). The painting, whose title is said to have lent its name to the impressionist movement, is a drenched miasma of pale teal and pink; a single dot of vermilion punctuates the skyline. This daub is the sun, a celestial ember burning through the atmosphere, but also a point of pure abstraction. A trio of red dots dance across *Fierce Jewels* and, offset by the periwinkles and pale blues, I’m tempted to see it as a port scene akin to the ones Monet painted at Le Havre in the 1870s. A consummate painter and historian, McIntyre deftly manoeuvres the centuries of painting, adding arrows to her quiver when they serve.

Emma McIntyre’s *Pour plenty on the worlds* at Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles, is on view through 6 March 2021.

*Main image: Emma McIntyre, 'Pour plenty on the worlds', 2021, exhibition view, Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles. Courtesy: the artist and Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles*