



NICK MALONE
KAVALA



Kavala II (detail)

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12 July 2023

Curated by **Gabriela Avian**

Catalogue essay by **Mark Hudson**



Kavala I (detail)

THE KAVALA SERIES IN THE WORK OF NICK MALONE

MARK HUDSON

The art of Nick Malone exists at the interface of abstraction and representation, of visual art and literature. The artist has been at different times both painter and writer, and these sometime and ongoing creative identities seem to jostle for position in the works in this exhibition, which have the character of letters or memos as much as paintings or drawings, missives that have been scrawled, splashed, collaged and drawn by the artist, and addressed to himself at a pivotal juncture in his career.

Executed on very large sheets of paper over the course of an eight day residency at the Eutopia Art Residency in Kavala, Northern Greece, the mostly monochrome works overlay vigorous dripping, splashing and spraying in black ink with very precisely drawn animal imagery – dragonflies, sea urchins, lizards cut-out and stuck onto these expressive surfaces.

More eyes and jaws and teeth emerge from the crowded painterly backgrounds: fierce fish, predatory birds – owls, crows – a goat, creatures with particular transformative and metamorphic potential for the artist – and haunted human faces very simply delineated with an almost absent-minded quality redolent of a trance or dream state. And as always with Malone, the word, whether written, drawn or spoken, is never far away.

Three handwritten poems presented as paintings attest to a positively animistic sense of identification with the animal and material universe, expressed in richly lyrical terms.

Where artists' uses of the painted word have tended to favour the brief, barely coherent exclamation – think of Antoni Tàpies or the early David Hockney – Malone's verbal interventions have a brimming fluency, the sense that there are



Kavala I (detail)

extensive verbal dimensions lurking beneath the surfaces of his painting positively bursting to make themselves felt, which is often precisely the case.

After winning substantial prizes for his poetry, Malone forsook writing for painting and drawing as his central mode of expression. His first art degree provided a modernist environment in which any hint of representation – or “illustration” – was anathema, and while he embraced formalist imperatives of involvement with the materiality of the paint, he could not keep the lyrical impulse entirely at bay. His apparently abstract *Passages* series of paintings, first exhibited in 2008 with their complex branching forms, have whole tracts of his extended narrative poem *Jason Smith’s Nocturnal Opera* inscribed into them.

Central to Malone’s work over the past decade has been a mysterious “graphic novel”, *The Disappearance of Makepeace, A Tale of Two Lives*, that has been seen by very few people (though extracts can be heard on the artist’s website, and imagery and passages have been published as an

artist’s book, *Eustace and Makepeace - Their Final Encounter*, with the support of Arts Council England). Yet its themes of metamorphosis and the reconciliation of opposites have infused Malone’s painting in elliptical and sometimes enigmatic ways. Concerning two friends growing up in and around a rambling mansion in the north of England – inspired by the house in which Malone himself was raised – the book addresses the two sides of Malone’s personality and the duality that exists in all of us. On the one hand there is the stolid Eustace, who represents practical everyday reality, and on the other the wayward and mercurial Makepeace who “opens trapdoors and windows into worlds beyond.” Eustace realises that it is only by finding and coming to terms with Makepeace, who mysteriously disappears early in his adult life to be finally encountered decades later, that he can fully realise himself and be at peace.

The book’s “graphic” content has been realised not through the standard strips of images and speech bubbles, but through paintings, installations and entire

exhibitions that interpret its narrative symbolically rather than literally. An exhibition at the Bermondsey Project Space in 2019 created a nursery nightmare environment with images of threatening animals, sinister fairy tale figures and an eerie empty-eyed child emblazoned on free-standing canvases – like stage sets containing the substance of their own drama. Window-like apertures in their surfaces allowed the viewer to look through to other paintings and different worlds.

This trajectory reached its climax in a towering arrangement of six canvases created for the Milton Keynes Gallery in 2020, in which the book's violent but ambiguously optimistic ending was played out in an arrangement of scenes and symbolic elements that twisted totem pole-like towards the ceiling – and the heavens.

So the current exhibition finds Malone gathering his resources, having staged his own symbolic death and quasi-resurrection in Milton Keynes, recuperating in faraway northern Greece amid an imagistic fallout

of his signature forms, which disport themselves in these paintings through the transformative and metamorphic realms of water and air.

Mark Hudson is Chief Art Critic for The Independent and the author of 'Titian, The Last Days' (Bloomsbury)

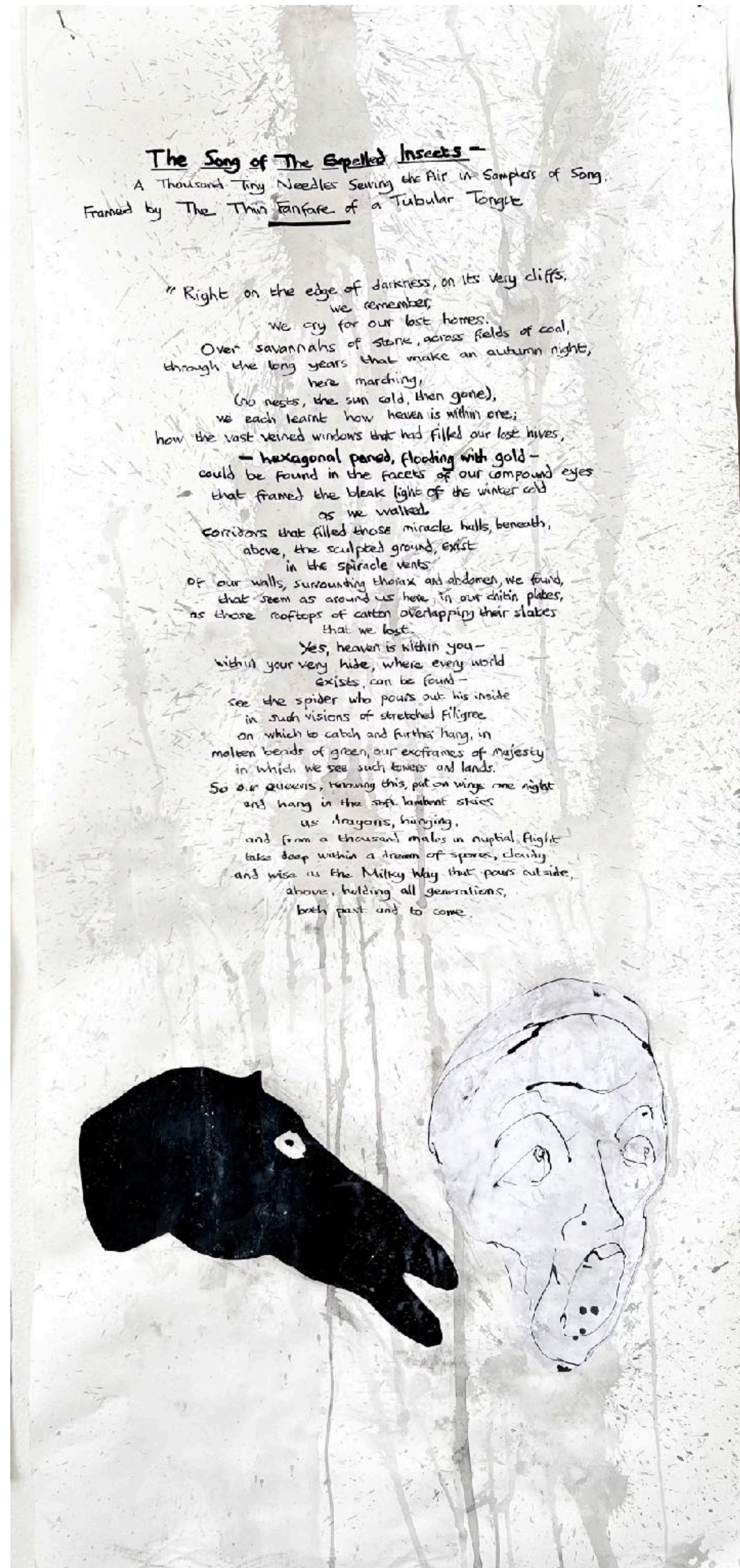
Exhibition Plates



Kavala II (2023) 152 x 244 cms Mixed Media on Paper



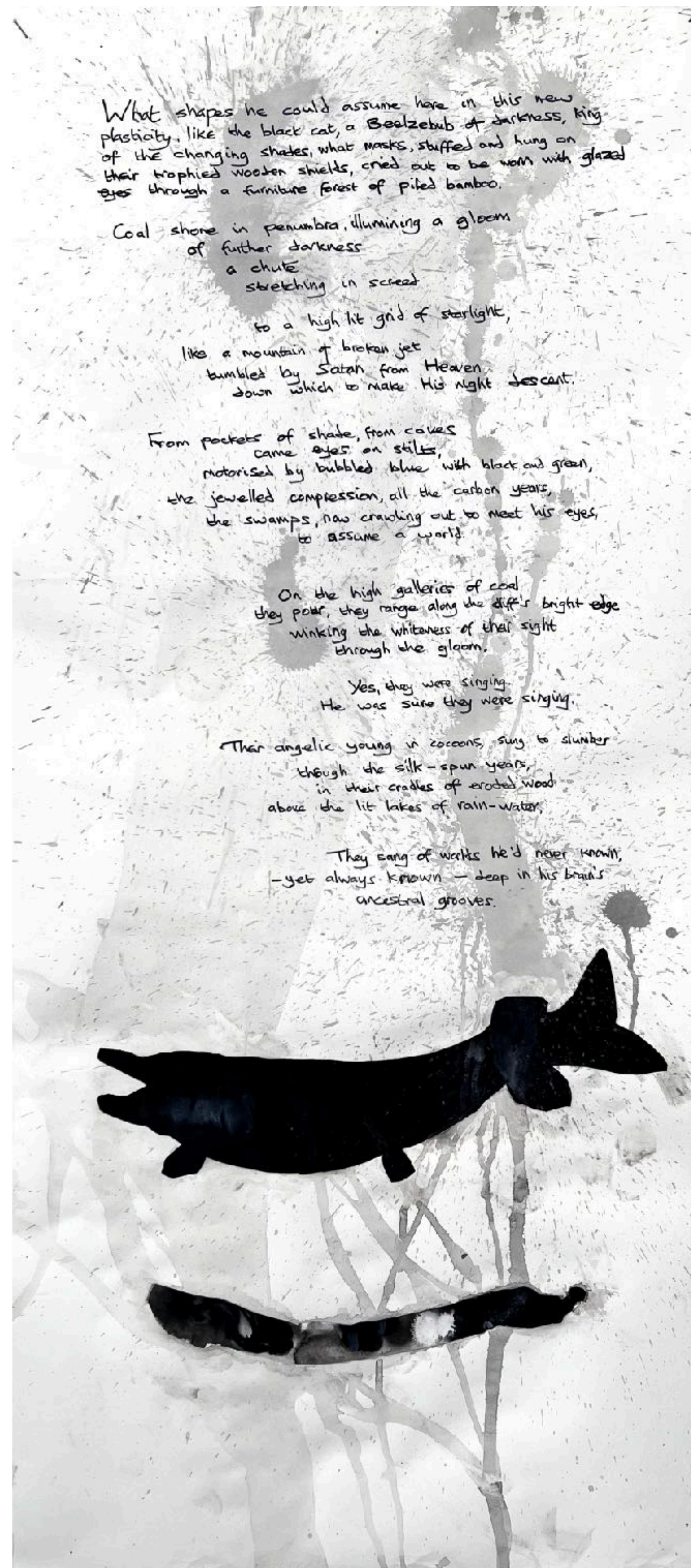
Kavala VI (2023) 150 x 47 cm Mixed Media on Paper



Kavala III (2023) 150 x 65 cm Mixed Media on Paper



Kavala VII (2023) 152 x 244 cm Mixed Media on Paper



Kavala I (2023) 150 x 65 cm Mixed Media on Paper



Eustace and Makepeace - Their Final Encounter (2020) 152 x 244 cms Acrylic and Charcoal on Canvas



Kavala IV (2023) 152 x 122 cms Mixed Media on Paper



Kavala V (2023) 152 x 122 cms Mixed Media on Paper



The Disappearance of Makepeace II (2018) 82 x 61 x 8 cms Mixed Media

About Nick Malone

Nick Malone's paintings are stories of transformation, examining issues of identity, disappearance and change. Malone crosses art forms to create adventures through paintings, drawings, artist's books and podcasts.

He was awarded an MA with Distinction in Contemporary Literature at Queen Mary College and an MA in Fine Art at Central St. Martins. He currently lives and works in London.

Initially a writer, he abandoned his former life to become a full-time artist. His work has been exhibited across the world, from Tokyo to Idaho in the United States, including at the Royal Academy and the Carrousel du Louvre. He has won various important awards, including Arts Council England Awards and Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts.

'My current work explores issues of identity, dissolution and change through paintings, drawings and story.'



Some work combines paintings with writing to enable words and paper to interact in unforeseen ways, at that interchange of observation and dream where new kinds of art can still be developed.'

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2023 - *Eutopia Art Award - Residency Exhibition*, Eutopia Gallery, Kavala, Greece
- 2022 - *Passages of Transformation*, Bermondsey Project Space, London
- 2018 - *The Disappearance of Makepeace*, Bermondsey Project Space, London
- 2017 - *A Tale of Two Lives*, Art Bermondsey Project Space, London
- 2008 - *Passages*, SW1 Gallery, London
- 2005 - *New Work from Cyprus*, The Hellenic Centre, London
- 2002 - *Lost Eidolons*, Vertigo Gallery, London
- 2001 - *Chamber*, e1 Gallery, London
- 1999 - *Recovering*, e1 Gallery, London
- 1998 - *New Work*, Conningsby Gallery, London
- 1996 - *Balkan Earth*, British Council, Greece
- 1994 - *Nick Malone*, The Central Exhibition Gallery, Milton Keynes
- 1993 - *New Work*, University of Luton
- 1992 - *Excavations*, The Open University
- 2017 - *Visions*, Anima Mundi Festival, Palazzo Ca' Zanardi, Venice Biennale
- 2016 - *Secret Art Prize*, Curious Duke Gallery, London
- 2016 - *Royal Watercolour Society Contemporary Watercolour Exhibition*, Bankside, London
- 2014 - *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Arts, London
- 2014 - *Open Exhibition*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London
- 2014 - *Royal Watercolour Society Contemporary Watercolour Exhibition*, Bankside, London
- 2010 - *Paper Myths: Constructing the Other*, Course Exhibition, Tate Modern, London
- 2006 - *MA Graduation Show*, Central St. Martins, London
- 2006 - *Quick and Dirty*, Oxo Tower, Bargehouse Gallery, London
- 2005 - *Discord*, Temporary Contemporary, London
- 2005 - *Gallery Artists*, Vertigo Gallery, London
- 2004 - *Contemporary British Painting*, EWACC, Tokyo
- 2003 - *Art London*, Contemporary Art Fair, London
- 2002 - *British Painting Now*, Arts Council Gallery, Idaho, USA
- 2001 - *London Contemporary Art Fair*, Chelsea, London
- 2000 - *Art Paris*, Carousel du Louvre, Paris
- 2000 - *The New Elemental Aesthetic*, e1 Gallery, London
- 1999 - *Vital Art*, The Gallery, Clerkenwell, London
- 1997 - *The Hunting National Art Competition*, London
- 1996 - *Dragons on the Move*, The Raw Gallery, London
- 1995 - *Connecting Lines*, The Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, Holland
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Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2022 - *Visions, Anima Mundi*, Palazzo Bembo, Venice Biennale
- 2020 - *MK Calling*, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes
- 2020 - *Royal Watercolour Society Contemporary Watercolour Exhibition*, Bankside, London
(Judges Choice: Tim Sayer)

Recent Awards

2023 - Eutopia Art Residency
2020 - Arts Council England Award
2020 - Bursary - The Royal Society of Arts

Education

2006 - MA Fine Art, Central St. Martins, London
1992 - BA Hons, Fine Art, University of Hertfordshire
1986 - BA (Distinction), Adult Education, Garnett College, University of London
1984 - MA (Distinction), Modern English Literature, Queen Mary College, University of London

Selected Collections

The British Council
The Royal Society of Arts
Salford Art Gallery
Milton Keynes Art Gallery Archive
Drawing Room
University of Wisconsin
One Aldwych
Horsham Arts Centre
BUPA
Tradition Financial Services
Granville Holdings
West LB
GlaxoSmithKline
I Hennig & Co Brokers
RAC
Manches LLP

Selected Writing

Eustace and Makepeace: Their Final Encounter,
Artist's Book, 2020
Jason Smith's Nocturnal Opera, The Cinnamon Press, 2008
The Song of the Expelled Insects - Prizewinner, The National Poetry Competition
The Burial of Crispin Pike, Introduction by Sir William Empson, The Workshop Press

Selected Bibliography

Matthew Radford, *Passages of Transformation*,
Essay, 2022
Sacha Craddock, *The Disappearance of Makepeace*,
Catalogue, 2018
Anna McNay, *Travelling Through Space and Time: Meaning and Interpretation in the Work of Nick Malone, A Tale of Two Lives*, Catalogue, 2017
JJ Charlesworth, *Passages*, Catalogue, SW1 Gallery, 2008
John Haffenden, *William Empson: Against the Christians*, Vol. 2, OUP, 2006, pp 531 - 534
Selected Letters of William Empson, (ed John Haffenden), OUP, 2006
Gregory Desjardins, *Chamber*, Catalogue, e 1 Gallery, 1999
Libby Anson, *Recovering*, Catalogue, e. 1 Gallery, 1999
Rachel Campbell-Johnson, *Around The London Galleries*, 1999



Catalogue design by Megan Young

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Front cover: Detail from *Kavalla VII*

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Back cover: Detail from *Kavalla II*