

Ella McVeigh

Something Sonnets

March 21 — April 30, 2025

At the heart of Ella McVeigh's practice lies an inquiry into the act of looking—both as an aesthetic experience and as a conceptual framework for painting. Her latest body of work, *Something Sonnets*, extends this preoccupation, channeling the artist's fascination with the transient nature of material culture and its echoes in contemporary abstraction. Rooted in a deeply personal engagement with visual stimuli, these paintings emerge from McVeigh's sustained exploration of surface, composition, and the ways in which images coalesce and dissolve through the painted medium.

Referencing her process, McVeigh describes the genesis of these works: *"I set out with quite a clear idea as to how I was going to compose the images. Based on seeing the piles of ephemera I had encountered at a book fair—stacks of pages out of the context of their bindings, engravings of natural history, views of landmarks, engineering illustrations, food labels, visiting cards, letters, portraits, loose photographs from albums, postcards—I thought about making images from collages of drawings that I had amassed in my studio. Beginning to work from these, I could see that they were too resolved and it was making for dull images. But from these collages, I made a series of quick monoprints that were quite sparse. Most of them I could not find anything of interest in, but a few sparked excitement and connected with certain thoughts, becoming the starting point."*

This embrace of contingency, of allowing the image to assert itself rather than imposing a predetermined structure, aligns McVeigh with a lineage of painters who have approached abstraction as a means of discovery rather than a fixed system. While abstraction has often been framed as a pursuit of pure form—whether through the gestural intensity of expressive mark-making or the calculated restraint of structured compositions—McVeigh's work resists such rigid categorizations. Her approach instead foregrounds the interplay between spontaneity and intention, where the painted surface remains in flux, shaped by instinctual responses to material and image alike. The act of painting is not a resolution but an unfolding, where the image oscillates between presence and absence, between the tangible and the elusive. Through this process, the work becomes a site of accumulation and dissolution, embodying a dynamic tension that mirrors the fluid nature of perception itself.

In *Something Sonnets*, McVeigh draws an explicit parallel between painting and poetry. *"Sonnets are generally poems of love. These paintings are formed from my yearning to understand the excitement of looking."* Here, love is understood not as a subject but as an approach—an intensity of attention, a sustained engagement with material and image alike. The resulting works carry a sense of reverence, a painterly response to the accumulation of found images and historical fragments that first captivated her at the book fair.

McVeigh's technique reveals an intuitive play between structure and dissolution. In her Burnish series, a single drawing serves as the generative force behind multiple paintings, much like a poetic refrain that carries variations in meaning through repetition. As she notes, *"The Burnish series is made from a drawing that was the starting point of the Burr paintings that we showed at Cork Street. It is a scrap of a drawing, and yet it evokes so many thoughts to do with images. And as you can see from that one starting point, there are so many branching thoughts."* This iterative process, in which a single image unfolds into multiple iterations, resonates with the rhythms of sonnets—structured yet fluid, bound yet expansive.

The two larger paintings in the series, along with their smaller counterparts, retain this logic of accumulation and distillation. McVeigh describes them as *"a string of visual ideas surrounding something that I have seen that are brought together into a painting. Those sources are more difficult to pinpoint in words."* This resistance to fixed interpretation, the refusal to dictate meaning, underscores the openness of her practice. Unlike traditional collage, where disparate elements are sutured into a cohesive whole, McVeigh's paintings remain in flux, allowing form to emerge and recede within layered fields of pigment and gesture.

If early abstraction sought to sever ties with representation in pursuit of a pure visual language, McVeigh reconfigures this history by engaging abstraction as an act of intimate reflection. Her paintings do not impose meaning; they invite it. *Something Sonnets* articulates a space in which looking itself becomes a form of devotion—a patient, attentive engagement with the shifting possibilities of paint and image alike.

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Ella McVeigh (b. 1992, London, UK) creates paintings and drawings interwoven with art history, the role of nature in art-making, and the possibilities of abstract painting today. Drawing from found imagery and objects, she explores painting as a mental performance of visual decision-making, where images from her personal archive—ranging from studio shots of flower arrangements to encyclopedias on minerals and geology—act as triggers for an array of mental connections to other images and experiences. McVeigh graduated with an MA in Painting from The Royal College of Art in 2020 and has exhibited in solo and group shows, including *Solid Air* at Opdahl, Oslo (2024, solo); *On Paper* at Newchild, online (2024); Art Brussels with Newchild, Brussels (2024); *Beyond Boundaries* at Guts Gallery, London (2024); *Nouvelle Vague* at LBF Contemporary, London (2023); *Once, Then, Gone* at Newchild, Antwerp (2023); *NOW* (curated by Romero Pimenta) at Museu Inima De Paula, Belo Horizonte (2023); *Continuum* at Frieze No. 9 Cork Street with Newchild, London (2023); Art Brussels with Newchild, Brussels (2023); Art Antwerp with Newchild, Antwerp (2022); ARTBO with Newchild, Bogotá (2022); *Each Glance Branching* at Newchild, Antwerp (2021, solo); *Seven Sisters* at Chadwell Award, London (2021, solo); *Wild Blue Yonder* at Newchild, Antwerp (2021); and *Tomorrow: London* at White Cube, London (2020). A recipient of the Chadwell Award (2020), McVeigh's work is included in the University of the Arts London Art Collection and the Collection of Romero Pimenta, Belo Horizonte. She lives and works in London.

Something Sonnets is on view from March 21 to April 30, 2025. Opening hours are Wednesday through Saturday from 13:00 to 18:00 hrs.