

Eleanor Louise Butt  
*After L'Été*

Catalogue text by  
Jeremy Eaton

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*Bathers, a picnic, a garden*

Eleanor Louise Butt  
*After L'Été*  
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Between the years of 1959-1961 Pablo Picasso developed 27 urgent and frenetic painterly studies based on Manet's infamous painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*Luncheon on the Grass*, 1863). Looking at these stylized iterations by Picasso you get a sense that he is aiming to better understand *Le Déjeuner*, to get inside the painting's mechanics through a heuristic testing of its compositional and painterly ideas. Picasso's stylized lavender nude sits amidst areas of thickly painted green and black foliage, and acts a test of the inner workings of the intense, atmospheric contrast employed in *Le Déjeuner* as a remarkable spatial device. Whilst Manet's painting acts as a provocative update of the classical trope of bathers (in particular Giorgione and Titian's *Le Concert champêtre*, 1509), Picasso's reworking of Manet shifts the focus from subject to process, asserting a material, painterly investigation as paramount to the narratives of images. Standing in Eleanor Louise Butt's studio with her radiant yellow palette emitted from paintings stacked floor to ceiling, a similar sense of someone aiming to understand the space generated by a painting through process is occurring. By insistently re-painting, Eleanor employs surface, colour and texture to materially traverse the imaginary gardens and fields of Pierre Bonnard's unusual work, *L'Été* (1917).

Bonnard's work, full of feathery forms, is a hallucinatory space, a dreamlike image simultaneously picturing an antiquated scene of bathing nymphs and a modern-day picnic. The evenness of detail and scale across *L'Été* establishes a strange pictorial equivalence that cuts through single point perspective, generating a temporal duality whereby two worlds are suspended amidst the phantasmagoria of paint. This duality, this extra-dimensional space inferred by Bonnard becomes the in-road for Eleanor as a field through which she can test a range of painterly ideas. The works in *After L'Été* have derived from a fascination with the brush work of Bonnard's painting resulting in dry brush works, layered in hues of yellow, brown, green, orange and blue. Throughout the process, elements within the paintings get interred beneath layers of freshly applied paint, generating a complex arrangement within which trees and bodies are masked amidst scattered marks, haunting the pictorial spaces.

Writing about Eleanor's painting Laura Couttie discerns two concurrent painterly vocabularies at play in her practice: that of a tight, defined planar abstraction and a DIY, intuitive looseness<sup>1</sup>. *After L'Été* marks a shift from the referential shapes of Eleanor's abstract vocabulary by interrogating the

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<sup>1</sup>Laura Couttie, Mnemonics, published alongside Mnemonics: Eleanor Louise Butt, Lon Gallery. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/551d7084e4b07556d7ca5909/t/5a16af-03ec212d9bd37d304e/1511436047510/Eleanor+Louise+Butt\\_LON+Gallery+essay.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/551d7084e4b07556d7ca5909/t/5a16af-03ec212d9bd37d304e/1511436047510/Eleanor+Louise+Butt_LON+Gallery+essay.pdf)

various painterly strategies of a brilliant, feathery modernist painting. The dryness of the brush strokes on minimally primed linen, hessian and jute carry a mottled materiality that appears to grip onto their ground. It's a technique that causes the marks to simultaneously seep into and sit atop the canvas. It was used by artists such as Francis Bacon to heighten the affective facility of oils to reach into the nervous system and grip the body. The gestural and material qualities resulting from this technique, in Eleanor's hands, creates a frayed layering of colours and forms that seep through one another granting the paintings a temporal quality that evokes Bonnard. Much like Picasso's exploration, Eleanor's aim has been to better understand Bonnard's work not through a recourse to its context, but through an embodied consideration of its visuality and how this informs its perceptual and conceptual characteristics.

What do these marks amount to? In an art context whereby works about 'modernism' are ubiquitous Eleanor's approach focusses on itinerate facets of what working materially and visually allows one to do. Eleanor's process constitutes an ontological investigation whereby materials and gestures become the arena for thinking

through time, touch, colour and composition. Standing in front of them I find myself following the acutely developed use of pentimento by the artist, responding to the textural gravitas of the works as I'm absorbed in the durational aspects of Eleanor's investigation. It is through this play and this moving with another through the act of painting that one experiences the pleasurable testing of the phenomena of visuality, something unique to the discipline of painting, gripping and subsequently shifting the way one perceives bathers, a picnic, a garden.

**Eleanor Louise Butt** is a Melbourne based artist, she Graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, degree with Honours, 2013. She has since exhibited at Sutton Projects, SPRING 1883, LON Gallery, CGK (Denmark), Fort Delta, Wellington St Projects, Town Hall Gallery (Hawthorn), VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Blindside ARI, Seventh Gallery, c3 Contemporary Art Space, Rubicon ARI and others. In 2016 she was a Macquarie Group Emerging Artist Prize finalist and an MCollection Art Award Finalist.

**Jeremy Eaton** is an artist and writer working in Narrm/Melbourne. Jeremy has written for un Magazine, Art + Australia, participated in the Gertrude Contemporary Emerging Writers Program and recently wrote a catalogue essay to accompany Meredith Turnbull's current exhibition, 'Closer' at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne.  
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