

COLIN FRASER
LOOKING TOWARDS LIGHT



22 Hazelton Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5R 2E2 (416) 964-8197 fax: (416) 964-5912
email: godard@godardgallery.com web: www.godardgallery.com

Cover image: **Sunline** 2013 egg tempera on board 46 1/2 x 70 7/8 inches

COLIN FRASER

Looking Towards Light

New Paintings

May 3 - 31, 2014



COLIN FRASER was born in Glasgow in 1956, studied art in Brighton and currently lives and works in Sweden. Represented by Mira Godard Gallery, Fraser has exhibited internationally in London, New York and Glasgow. His work is found in numerous private and corporate collections throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

COLIN FRASER - Looking Towards Light

The 12-foot high windows in the studio face south, and look directly towards the sun. The objects, landscapes and figures in my paintings are more often than not "contre-jour" or placed against the light. This has been a constant feature of the work for quite some time. Backlit subjects have a mystery about them with the light somehow creating a mood which dramatizes the everyday.

I have never been able to work on anything with any real depth directly from observation with a backlit subject. Apart from being literally blinded by the light, the light is fleeting and changes very quickly. Photography offers little help - there is usually plenty of drama but not much substance left after the bleaching of tonal quality renders most areas in this type of photo either black or white. Sketches help, but when making the paintings it's really down to memory, thought and imagination combining to make a sort of "reinvention". Only the eye can see everything. The challenge is to convey this drama without losing the detail or the subtleties created by the enveloping, evanescent light, as well as the beauty it conveys.

All the works in this exhibition are painted in egg tempera. It can be a very unforgiving medium, but over the years I have been able to find peace in my working method. All areas of colour in an egg tempera painting are semi-transparent. Tempera's unique luminosity is achieved as a result of the thin paint layers' ability to allow light to travel through it and bounce back off the intensely white gesso ground. The resultant "glow" resembles a picture viewed on a backlit screen, a little bit like an image seen on a computer.

There is an excitement about trying to paint something that is continually changing, and the knowledge that you can never keep up in your pursuit of it. I want to show everything I can. All the detail, all the tone, every hue, every colour. The mood or feeling it generates is the thing; it's there, obvious for a moment but disappearing like a face seen momentarily in a crowd. The remembering of it somehow enhances the mystery, forcing you to reach within yourself for the unobtainable answers.

One painting in particular, where the driving force is the excitement of trying to uncover such memories is "Sunline", a large landscape painted entirely in the studio. The sun is partly hidden behind a line of fir trees. Its inevitable journey upwards and westwards is briefly held in check by the bleached, dry treetops. The white chair and jacket with that red flower act as an anchor; a focal point providing a place of solidity to return to in the complexity of the French landscape with its particular winds, air and space. When working on this painting, the feeling is one of returning to the place itself, almost like spending hour after hour inside the picture frame.

"Pastoral Suite" is a group of four temperas with their origins in the south of France. The works show table-top still lifes with rural objects and locally gathered fruit, vegetables and flowers. I wanted to paint subject matter that could have been chosen 500 years ago, convinced that the tension between Renaissance-like subject matter and the perception of my contemporary eye would enhance the mystery and drama created by the arrangements and their placement towards the light.

The old masters used "chiaroscuro", or strongly contrasting side light, to model form in their work. Backlighting flattens out form and detail and is modern in its conception. I liked the idea of this contrast. The low horizon line also provides a modern feel with the viewer effectively sitting on the ground beside the table.

Each of the four works in "Pastoral Suite" has a main character. These are pieces of 19th century utilitarian French pottery broadly termed "confit". They have a quiet dignity and beauty and emanate a feel of their history. I must admit that I love the feel of these objects. Collecting them is something I'm very passionate about. This energy is something that I wanted to get into the work. The "suite" is an attempt to celebrate the beauty of the main characters in the context of their surrounding players combining together to create an entity united in its own mood.

A theme that I have come back to over the last 25 years is the open window set against sunlight. This has its beginnings in a particular room with a particular window from my mother's house, "The Whitehouse", in rural England. The room still holds its mystery to me although the window itself has long since been modernized and replaced. It is a largely unused room since my father's death fourteen years ago. It's a subject that I have revisited roughly once a year over almost three decades, and several paintings in this special theme have previously been shown at Mira Godard Gallery in Toronto. The room and window have taken many shapes and forms during this time. Each

work has added weight to the next and the process of “reinvention” mentioned earlier becomes more engaged as a result. "Last White Light" marks the probable end of this series from that particular place, and "White Dawn", although picking up elements of the Whitehouse window series, is a conscious move to a new place in the south of France. Here, the warm air floods into the room and the sunlight has an appearance of an even faster moving light than its northern European counterpart. The stronger light makes for a brighter, more colourful world with halos and blue skies reflected in the crystal clear shadows. To me, this definitely feels like the start of something.

"Highwayside" originates from glimpses of wild poppies seen whilst driving in my car. Knowing the short life span of these amazing plants and how quickly they wither once picked, provides a backdrop to the excitement felt in attempting to portray them. The memory of being dangerously parked by the side of a busy road and carefully trying to pick as many poppies as possible stayed with me and fired my imagination. Quite some time later, the painting was made with the feel of the delicacy and frailty of the poppies firmly on my mind. Like most truly beautiful things, poppies have a sinister side. This contrast intrigues me and somehow mirrors the danger and joy of picking them on the side of the busy road.

There is something about the fruit of lemon trees in my studio conservatory that compels me to study them. The ‘Lemon Rose’ pictures are a result of some of these studies. The lemons take about a year to grow, each one with its own distinct shape and feel. In combination with the white roses, these two pieces, at least to me, have a monumental quality. Paradoxically, working on a slightly smaller scale with objects in more or less their natural size, enhances the feeling of their importance. Not least because I have watched them grow day by passing day.

The two smaller "coloured air" paintings are the start of a new theme that I would like to be working with in the future. Air and space have always been of major importance to me in the work, and now the colour of the space gives the “air” an even more clearly defined personality.

The Swedish winter can be dark at times, although my studio is situated in the southern tip of this long country. We have lots of daylight, even during the shortest days of the year, but when sunlight breaks through the cloud layer, it has a strength and quality about it which is very special. The low sun immediately draws the eye to it, throwing off long cast shadows pointing towards the light.

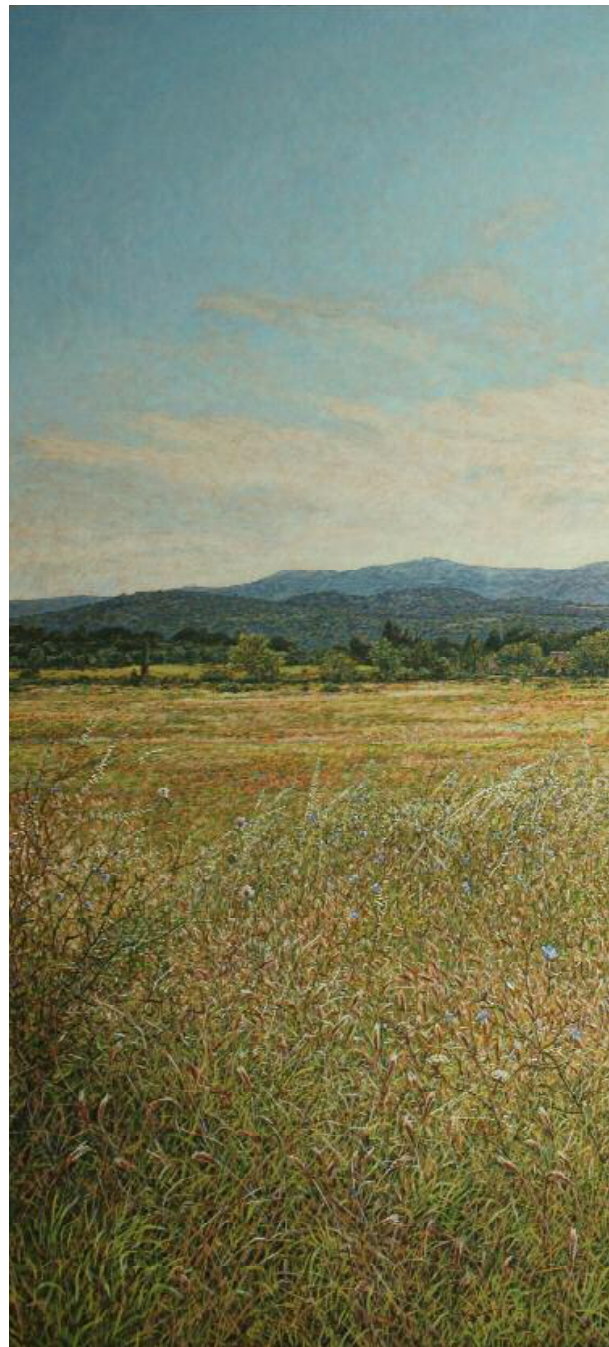
Colour Plates

Sunline

2013

egg tempera on board

46 1/2 x 70 7/8 inches





Pastoral Suite - Ochre

2013-2014

egg tempera on board

31 1/2 x 48 inches



Pastoral Suite - Terra Verte

2013-2014

egg tempera on board

31 1/2 x 48 inches

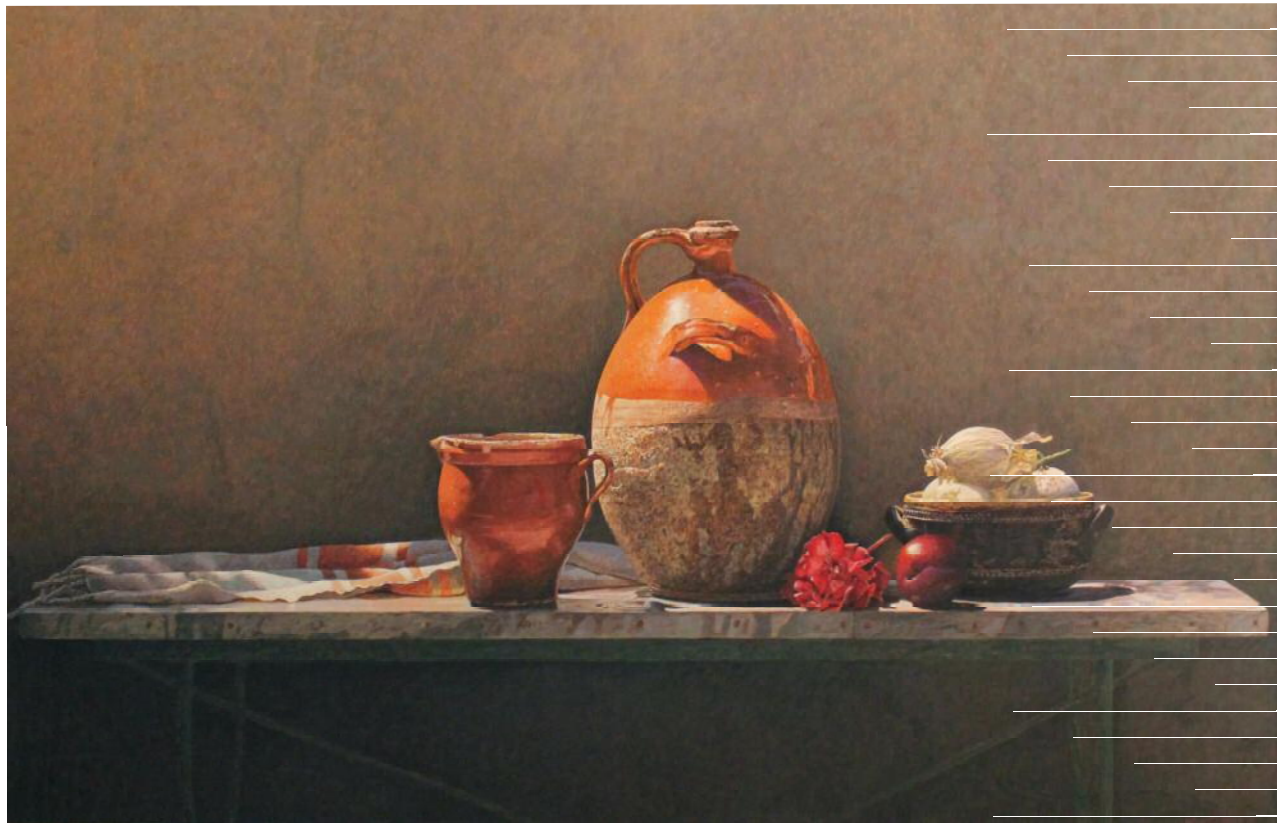


Pastoral Suite - Sienna

2013-2014

egg tempera on board

31 1/4 x 48 inches

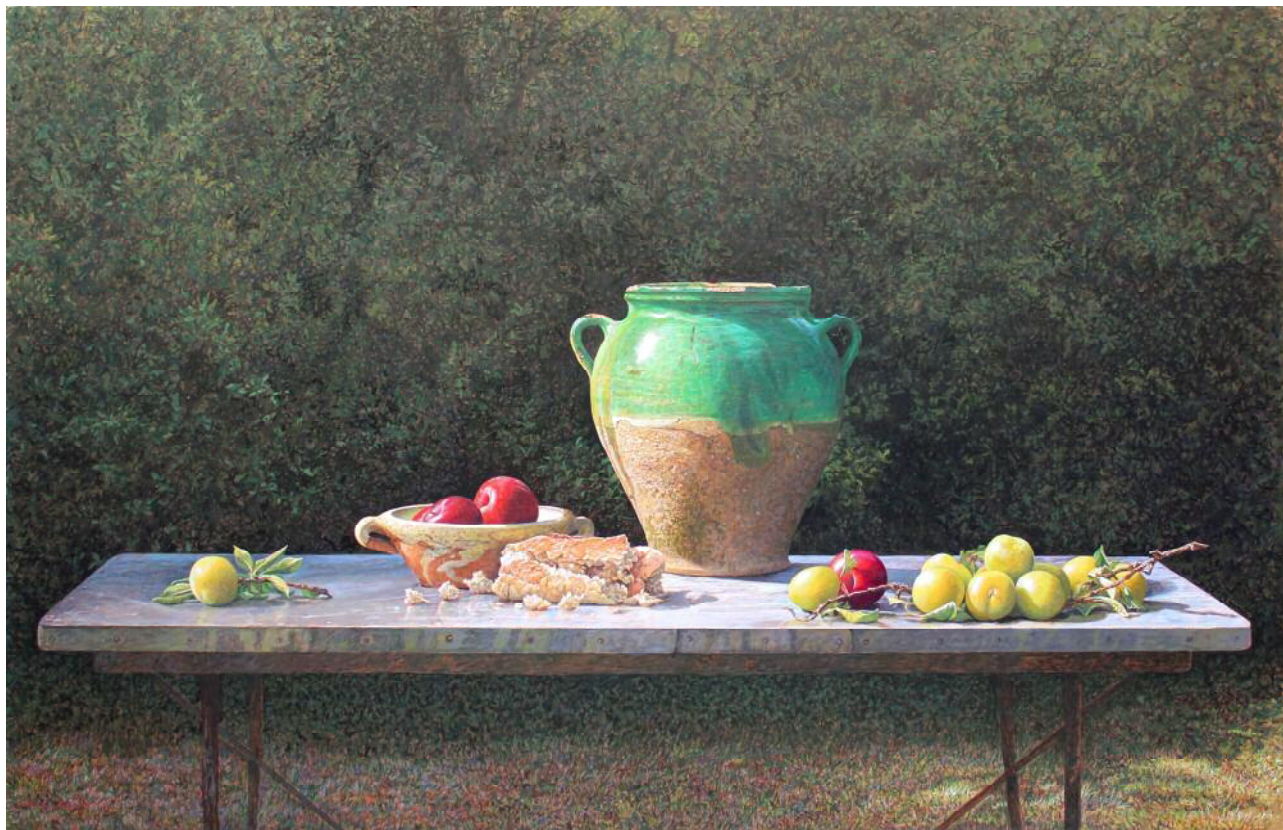


Pastoral Suite - Viridian

2013-2014

egg tempera on board

31 x 48 inches



Last White Light

2014

egg tempera on board

39 1/4 x 48 inches



White Dawn

2013

egg tempera on board

39 1/4 x 48 inches



Highwayside

2013-2014

egg tempera on board

48 x 39 1/4 inches



Lemon Rose #1

2013

egg tempera on board

20 1/4 x 33 inches

Lemon Rose #2

2013

egg tempera on board

20 1/4 x 33 inches



Red Air

2014

egg tempera on board

20 1/2 x 15 3/4 inches



Blue Air

2014

egg tempera on board

20 1/2 x 15 3/4 inches



Looking Towards Light

2013-2014

egg tempera on board

39 1/4 x 48 inches



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Looking Towards Light Colin Fraser

Artwork photography: Colin Fraser

Artist's photo (page 3): Toby Smedley, Exposure Photography (UK)

Printing: Springfield Graphics, Toronto, Ontario

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ISBN# 978-0-9691144-2-0



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Mira Godard
Gallery

22 Hazelton Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5R 2E2 (416) 964-8197 fax: (416) 964-5912
email: godard@godardgallery.com web: www.godardgallery.com