



Just visiting

Recently I joined a ghost writing group. We visited necropastoral sites, played with poetry constraints and tried to find forms that would be inviting to those beyond the pale.

To sail through light winds is one meaning of the word ghost. To ghost is also to never reply to someone, a wordless disappearance, presence felt in absence.

We learnt that ghost comes from the German 'gheis', which can mean excitement, amazement and fear. In old English, 'gast'; breath, guest.

My writing was heavy handed as it tried to be inspired. To create space for ghosts requires a lot of call and little response, I found.

I heard that ghosts like gaps: a way in. I sliced up some canvas and created a sort of blind painting. Blind as in window covering. It felt airy and difficult.

A way out.

I found myself returning to my old work in spirit. I conjured moments from my painting past.

Where was it all going? Nowhere. Back though time or maybe forward. The ghostly material started slipping into the paintings. "Should I let it in?" I wondered. Do I have a choice?

"Time is starting to play tricks."⁽¹⁾

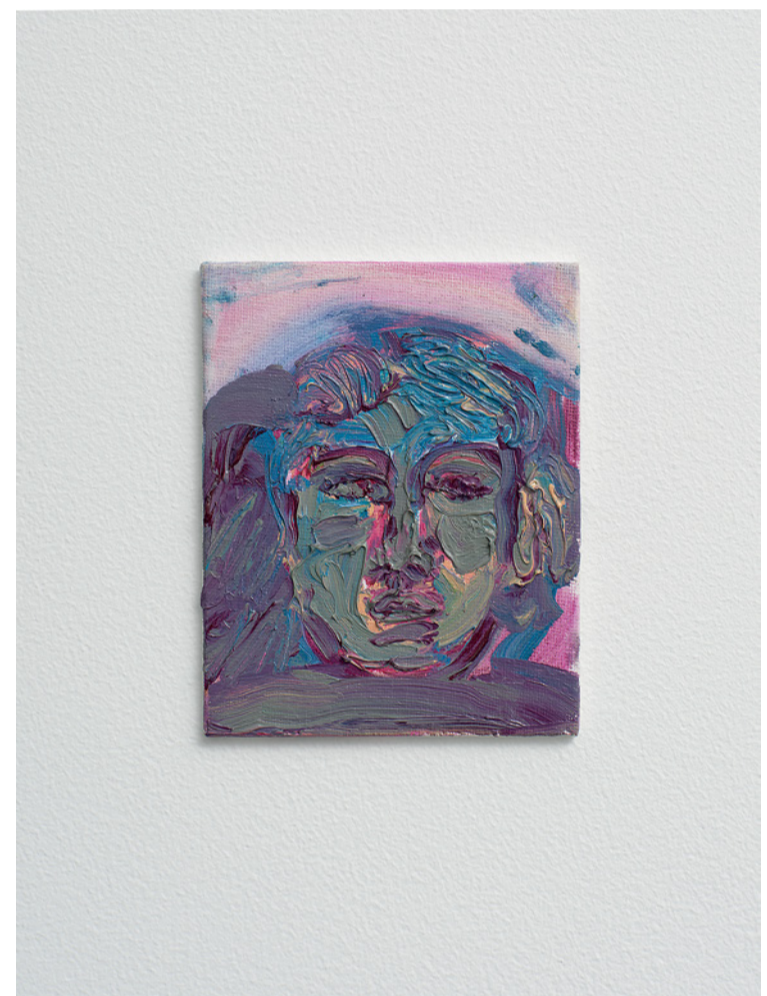
In Robert McFarlane's *Underland* the author visits a dark matter scientist deep down under the ground. Thinking about how effortlessly neutrinos pass through our bodies McFarlane asks: "Does it change the way you feel about matter – about what matters?"⁽²⁾

The scientist replies to McFarlane by speaking about his knowledge that our bodies are "wide-meshed nets, and that the cliffs we're walking on are nets too," and how he wonders, sometimes, what it is like not to know that.

There is a certain reassuring resistance to oil on canvas. I push and push but can't get through.

I start to think of myself as the ghost, haunting my own work. In the finished work I am the absent body. To the future viewer, you, I am hard to understand at times. I mumble, groan, move objects, turn on lights, make things levitate, and then I leave.

–MJ



To hand, 2024
oil on canvas
125 x 100mm

overleaf:
Anaphora & Clinamen, 2024
oil on linen
330 x 410mm

1, 2 Robert McFarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*, 2019.