

# *Close your eyes; press down on your lids*

**Anneka French reflects on  
Rosie Morris' new commission,  
'In / out / of this world'**

'Sunlit Walls' (detail), Rosie Morris, enlarged print of soft pastel drawing, from 'In / out / of this world', Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, 2021, photo credit: Colin Davidson



Children experience spatial and temporal slippage every day. Napping for 90 minutes and waking up in a different city is commonplace. Our own sense of slippage is more commonly experienced via screens of varying kinds – portals at our fingertips to other locations and times – these are effects facilitated by technology and heightened by the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on lives lived IRL. As I write, I am trying to send my youngest son back to sleep in a basket next to my desk via a YouTube soundtrack titled 'Celestial White Noise'. It's making me feel dizzy.

Something of these strange phenomena can be found within the various components of 'In / out / of this world', a new multimedia commission by Rosie Morris for 'Expanded Interiors Re-Staged' at the Hatton Gallery. Morris' work forms part of a wider project by artist Catrin Huber, created in response to the sites Pompeii and Herculaneum, cities in south western Italy famously buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. Morris was part of the Expanded Interiors Research Group, 2017-19, and worked alongside Huber and a team of archaeologists to research Casa del Criptoportico (House of the Criptoporticus), Pompeii, and Casa del Bel Cortile (House of the Beautiful Courtyard), Herculaneum. The team investigated the relationship between contemporary fine art and Ancient Roman houses, artefacts and

wall painting practices, attempting to create new conversations in this field of research. Morris' influences, however, are more complex than Ancient Rome alone.

'In / out / of this world' brings together diorama, photography, video projection, painting and drawing to explore themes of threshold, place and time. Into the rich mix of visual cultures from Ancient Rome, Morris also brings her own domestic architectural context and her recent experiences of parenthood.

The gallery space Morris' work occupies has no windows. Morris instead reminds us of the outside world and of both real and imagined places through a series of works that recall and connect. The exhibition is a room within a room and extremes of scale and colour run throughout, creating

spaces that borrow from elsewhere, from the body and from the imagination.

In 'Sunlit Walls' (all works 2021), vivid pinks, oranges, reds, dark purple and paler blues, evocative of the Mediterranean or the kinds of hot, bursting colours that emerge when you close your eyes and press down on your lids, coat enlarged drawings on paper that cover the gallery walls like tapestries. Pigment is applied to a textured ground, crumbly, like dust, here magnified to an enormous scale. Shapes are suggestive of abstracted architectural features: a hearth – the traditional focal point of a room or heart of the home, here rendered as a dark void – alongside rhombus forms and shafts of spilt light. Colour is intense and it is bodily; not quite a facsimile of its starting points nor its 'original' drawing but something more layered



and intimate.

Elsewhere, in 'Threshold', lines of vinyl diamonds pull our feet forward across the floor and into the exhibition space. These geometric tile-like fragments speak to Roman mosaic floors and equally to the black and white tiles of the Hatton Gallery's Edwardian entrance. If we shift our perspective in an upward rotation of ninety degrees, to the filmic aspects of 'Threshold', the diamond shapes appear as an unmoving beaded curtain, of the kind found in corner shops or butchers, demarcating public space from private in the flimsiest of ways. Perspective is ambiguous here. 'Threshold' evokes a sense of peace and of time passing through subtle shifts in shadow and daylight in the predominantly black and white projection. The camera tracks a dancing pale gold light from east to west and fills the gallery at the significant size of four metres high.

The exhibition sets into play the enormous and the miniature. Certain works are presented at a domestic scale, fit for human bodies of child or adult size, or as miniature dioramas. These are more intimate openings, perhaps more palpable, more concrete, more like the kinds of spaces we have been cooped up inside for the last eighteen months. 'From where I sit', for example, is a photograph taken from Morris' son's bedroom at night, his door ajar, leading our eyes to the unseen landing of their home. Morris' works are like reminders – places and times that feel like those we have been before, like memories of old lives that we cannot quite put our finger on. They are gently uncanny architectures, familiar in the sense that we know something of their starting points – derived from and connected to Ancient Rome, the gallery and to her home – but rendered different by a change in context, scale, juxtaposition and by our faulty recollections.





'In / out / of this world' (installation view), including from left, 'Threshold', 'Sunlit walls', 'Curtains', 'This chamber of mine', 'From where I sit', Rosie Morris, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, 2021, photo courtesy of the artist

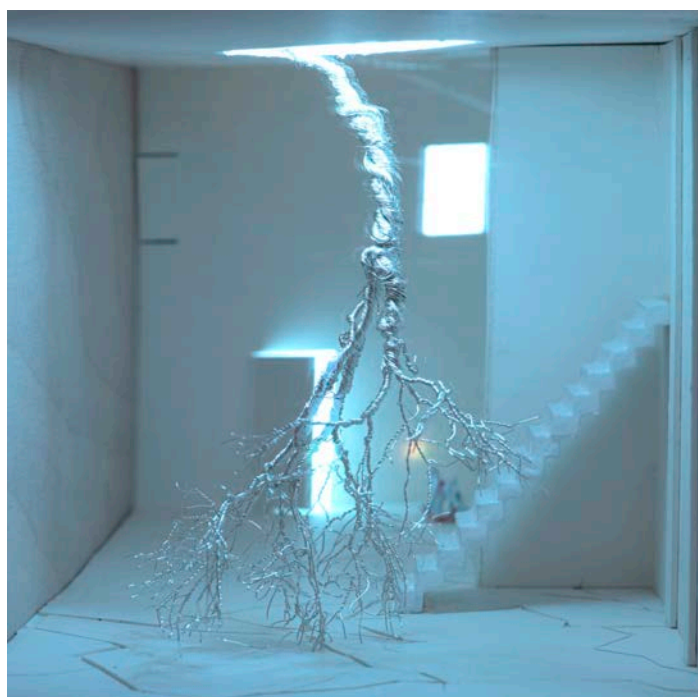
'This chamber of mine' (detail), Rosie Morris, birch plywood, mount board, obeche, primer, wire, rocking horse, LED light, from 'In / out / of this world', Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, 2021, photo credit: Colin Davidson

The mirrored diorama 'This chamber of mine' features a staircase, rocking horse, tree roots and skylight on a tiny scale. It explicitly refers to surrealism, psychoanalysis and to the complicated relationship parents, and mothers in particular, have to the home.

Morris is no stranger to considering, in detail, the characteristics of place and possible manifestations within gallery spaces. The dominant work of 'Circles are Slices of Spheres', her exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery in 2016, filled the space with large delicately painted panels, curved to skim walls and part of the gallery floor. The work spoke to architectural blueprints, the design of civic space and the history of painting. This history includes the lineage of wall-based frescos – from Ancient Rome and revived during the Renaissance, a trompe-l'oeil optical illusion as per Pompeii – as well as the more recent practice of artists including Op Art's Bridget Riley or the sprawling, monumental, colour-cloud works of Katharina Grosse. At the Laing Art Gallery, Morris displayed soft blue textural marks, precisely shaped into geometric forms. Like those in 'In / out / of this world', these paintings created the impression of recesses and protrusions, windows, hallways and arches that suggested an extension of existing architecture into other spaces – site-responsive portals on to water, perhaps, or sky.

Space is consistently of the essence. Indeed, a script performed for the opening of 'Circles are Slices of Spheres', includes the following lines:

'We are in a void,  
A void removed from the world -



Perhaps for reflection, for introspection, silence’.

So too, at the Hatton Gallery, we find that Morris has succeeded in creating a reflective space, a recreated space, a nuanced space. Within it, are layers of the real, virtual and painterly, and each is imbued with the ability to transport us while holding us firmly within physical space. Indeed, in her writing accompanying this new body of work, Morris astutely observes:

‘Look back and everything has changed’.

‘In / out / of this world’ (installation view), including from left, ‘Curtains’, ‘This chamber of mine’, ‘From where I sit’ and ‘Sunlit walls’, Rosie Morris, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, 2021, photo credit: Colin Davidson

## Biographies

**Rosie Morris** (b. 1986, Nottingham, UK), makes installations to reconnect the viewer with the excitement and wonder of being within an architectural space. A space can bear witness, be animated, tenacious, and open to exploration. Her constructions wrap around the space itself, using perspectival painting, film, sound, and written text to prompt the viewer to move and reassemble their perceptions, dislodging familiar encounters with reality.

Exhibitions include: ‘In / out / of this world’, commission for Expanded Interiors Re-Staged, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle (2021); ‘Notes on Navigating Space’, collaboration with Taryn Edmonds, Artlacuna, London (2017); ‘Circles are Slices of Spheres’, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle (2016-17); ‘COME TO DUST’, Generator Projects, Dundee (2016); Projector International Video Art Festival, Quinta del Sordo, Madrid, Spain (2015); 55 Westgate Road // Dreamers, Newcastle (2015); ‘Phase’, collaboration with Sam Grant, The Castle Keep, Newcastle (2014); and ‘Shifting Dimensions’ commission for Art, Villes & Paysage Festival’, Amiens, France (2014).

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**Anneka French** (b. 1985, Birmingham, UK) is an artist and writer with a special interest in topics of motherhood and place. Recent experimental writing and poetry commissions include those for Photoworks+, Grain Projects, Fire Station Artists’ Studios, Dreams-TimeFree, Axisweb, Creative Black Country and Living Memory. She writes regular reviews and essays for publications Art Quarterly and Photomonitor.

Anneka is a curator currently working with Coventry Biennial. She spent four years as Coordinator and then Director at regional visual arts network New Art West Midlands (part of CVAN) and six years as Editorial Manager of contemporary art magazine this is tomorrow. Anneka has worked at galleries including Tate Modern, Ikon, The New Art Gallery Walsall and Wolverhampton Art Gallery and has curated independent projects at KH7 ArtSpace, Aarhus, Denmark; Grand Union, Birmingham; Croome, Worcestershire (National Trust) among others.

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