



habitat

Helen Thomas

3 - 18 May 2024

Catalogue of available works
Contact hello@murama.co.uk for enquiries





Working with paint including acrylic, gouache and watercolour either on board, on paper and sometimes on canvas, Helen's studio practice transforms these records into stunning paintings that elevate these forgotten and overlooked life forms and invite the viewer to regard with wonder.

"Plants and their locale have always been the focus of my work in some way or another. When I first moved into my studio, at The Art House, in the centre of Wakefield in 2016 I felt a sense of disconnection from the edgelands areas, a few of miles out of town, that had previously informed my drawings and paintings.

"Interesting things happen at edges, margins, and in transitory spaces, as they shift through phases of use, vacancy and development. In an attempt to better understand my new environment, I began paying closer attention to what happens where a wall meets the pavement, where public space meets private property and in post and pre-development spaces. Whilst out picking litter one day, I checked a fleeting inclination to uproot a 'weed'. It's not uncommon for pavement plants and litter to be associated by their proximity.

Specificity of time place and plants are the subject matter for this Wakefield-based artist who is inspired by plants and their locales. Working in response to gardens, countryside and post-industrial edgelands, Helen has become focused on unplanned plants and organisms that grow haphazardly in carparks, on pavements, walls, edges of paths - the margins of our urban environment.

Helen records and maps the minutiae of these plants through her fieldwork, in which she embarks on drawing, painting and note-taking from direct observation.

In the studio, Helen's process of painting is concurrent with slow looking. The paintings extend an invitation to take time on fringes and fragments of plants caught freeze-frame in the break of a stride, where ribbons of micro-habitats thread through the overlooked and seemingly insignificant.





"In the studio, I paint from printouts selected from the many phone snapshots that I take on daily walks; I also refer to the digital images on my laptop. This is a close but not specifically accurate process of interpretation which involves memory, visual perception and visual interpretation combined with the material qualities of paint and the processes of painting. I sometimes make several paintings from the same reference photo, the composition, proportions and varying from format to format. The painting is slow; in the time frame that it takes to complete a studio painting, the corresponding plant might have completed more than one life cycle.

When I'm painting or sketching on-site I often note the date, location and plant names (if I know them). Through painting and paying attention to the specificity of the details I realised that this 'could be anywhere' patch of ground held clues: the way that dandelion grows, those fragments of dry bramble stem, the moss, those seedlings. What, at first glance, might seem to be an image that could be from any town or village in the UK is actually a micro-scape of a particular somewhere.

"They seem, to the unconditioned urban eye, as insignificant and maybe as annoying as a splash of spilt green paint". As I carefully started to disentangle crisp packets, cans and plastic from leaves, stems and flowers, I began to see these fragile green fringes with fresh eyes. Here, often in improbable conditions, grew plants that had somehow found ways to survive.

Richard Mabey The Unofficial Countryside

Helen not only provokes us to look again, but also to value these edgeland species; "wildflowers can support bees, butterflies & birds; they help trap pollution and they bring colour and softness to the built environment. Once we start to notice and reconsider these plants they can be seen as part of a fascinating wildlife habitat and an opportunity for much-sought connection with nature, on our doorstep, at our feet.

Might we reconsider the plants, in our day-to-day surroundings, that are often overlooked and dismissed as weeds? Can we consider an alternative to the excessively mowed, trimmed and sprayed 'landscape maintenance'? I wanted to get in close, to slow down the looking "where the snatched side-long glance is the convention."





Smyth Street
acrylic on board
framed
21.5x30cm
2024

750



7386,II
acrylic on board
framed
21.5x30cm
2020

750



7386,III
acrylic on board
framed
21.5x30cm
2020

750

To enquire or reserve an artwork, please email nancy@murama.co.uk



7386,IV
acrylic on board
framed
21.5x30cm
2020

750

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Maybe Waldorf Way IV
acrylic on board
unframed
21.5x30cm
2022

700



Shepherd's Purse, Herbicide, Denby Dale Road, I
acrylic on board
unframed
21.5x30cm
2022

700



Herbicide
acrylic on board
unframed
21.5x30cm
2021

700



Moss, Ings Road Roundabout
acrylic on board
unframed
21.5x30cm
2021

700



7386,1
acrylic on board
unframed
21.5x30cm
2020

700



Lichen, Mulberry Way, III
acrylic on board
unframed
50.8 x 40.6cm
2022

1100



Lichen, Mulberry Way, IV
acrylic on board
unframed
50.8 x 40.6cm
2022

1100



Lichen, Mulberry Way, I
acrylic on paper
unframed
100 x 150cm
2022

1200



Lichen, Mulberry Way, II
acrylic on paper
unframed
100 x 150cm
2022

1200

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Shepherd's Purse, Herbicide, Denby Dale Road, III
acrylic on paper
unframed
200 x 150cm
2023

1750



Shepherd's Purse, Herbicide, Denby Dale Road, II
acrylic on deep edged canvas
unframed
70 x 80x 4.5cm
2023

1450

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Maybe Shepherd's Purse, Symons Street IV
acrylic on deep edged canvas
unframed
70 x 80x 4.5cm
2024

1450



George Street
acrylic on deep edged canvas
unframed
70 x 80x 4.5cm
2024

1450



Helen Thomas is a contemporary British painter based in Wakefield, England. She graduated from Falmouth School of Art (BA Fine Art) and completed a year of postgraduate study with Turps Art School.

Helen works with drawing and painting, on site and in the studio, to consider humanity's relationships with plants.

Helen's Arts Council England Funded project 'Dandelions and Double Yellows' culminated in a solo exhibition at Wakefield Cathedral as part of the Festival of The Earth in 2021.

Recent group exhibitions include Planting Ideas, St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery, Hampshire, 2024; Precious Little, Mura Ma, Stockport, 2023; Rogue Women 2, Manchester, Babble, Ilkeston Contemporary, Derbyshire, 2023; Entwined: Plants in Contemporary Painting, Huddersfield Art Gallery, 2022 and 20-21 Visual Arts, Scunthorpe 2023; Conversations with Nature, The Art House, Wakefield, 2022 and Jerwood Drawing Prize 2016.



Mura Ma is a contemporary art space and gallery showcasing work predominantly by emerging female artists, with a particular focus on painting.

The gallery selects artists based on a number of attributes including quality and continuous development of work, investment into their artistic practice, their response to critical discourse around process and painting.

This exhibition was not paid for by the artist although they do contribute to some costs, eg. promotional print and there is a commission on sales. The gallery is not for profit and invests in each of the artists it represents in order to promote and support the artists in developing their practice and developing an audience.

Mura Ma is independent and not publically funded and provides the following commercial services in order to support the galleries aims and to fund these exhibitions:

- Original artwork hire for domestic/home and commercial interiors
- Gallery hire for commercial and public events
- Artist takeovers and residencies
- Curatorial and Installation services

For further information please contact nancy@murama.co.uk

