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Aaron Perkins

At the still point,
there the dance is

12th February - 7th March

Jan Manton Art is pleased to present Aaron Perkins' latest series of work *At the still point, there the dance is*.

In this series, Perkins continues his exploration of history painting as a means to critically engage with the current affairs of contemporary society.

Using an abstracted combination of text and image obtained from various online news services, the works resist an all-at-once perception to privilege subjective interpretations made in the space between abstraction and figuration, between looking and reading, and between surface and interface.

All images by Thomas Oliver

Please note that while the colour of the works remain the same, due to nature of their reflective surfaces they will appear different in every environment they reside.

At the still point, there the dance is...

TS Eliot's poem *Burnt Norton*, published in 1936, is a meditation on the passage of time and the nature of existence. Although we live in the present, Eliot reminds us, time is constantly moving forward and the present is already becoming past. The title of Aaron Perkins' latest exhibition is taken from a verse of *Burnt Norton*, reflecting the way that the artist brings together fragments of text and images to create idiosyncratic documents of time. Each one of Perkins' paintings represents a single day, a conscious reference to the date paintings of On Kawara (1932-2014), in which the Japanese conceptual artist would faithfully transcribe the date of the day in a uniform font onto a background of solid colour (usually black).

Perkins demonstrates a similarly consistent, although far more subjective approach to the subject of time. His paintings are populated with the artist's attempts at solving the daily cryptic crossword. Scrawled in black pastel and spilling down the canvas, the artist's corrections are often visible, with letters crossed out. In the absence of the crossword clues themselves, the significance of these words is lost on the viewer. In a number of works, this nonsensical script is accompanied by line drawings of groups of people, or (in one instance) horses, taken from news stories of the day and abstracted.

The only clue to the origins of Perkins' source material lies in the titling of his works; like Kawara, Perkins uses the date of execution, but does not adhere to the Japanese artist's rule of destroying paintings not completed within a twenty-four hour time-frame.

Perkins describes his work as being 'archaeological rather than archival', that is the individual parts cannot be pieced together to form a coherent narrative. The artist's use of black pastel on a gloss black ground also means that the viewer's eye must move across the surface of each painting to decipher its contents; the viewer must spend time with the work.

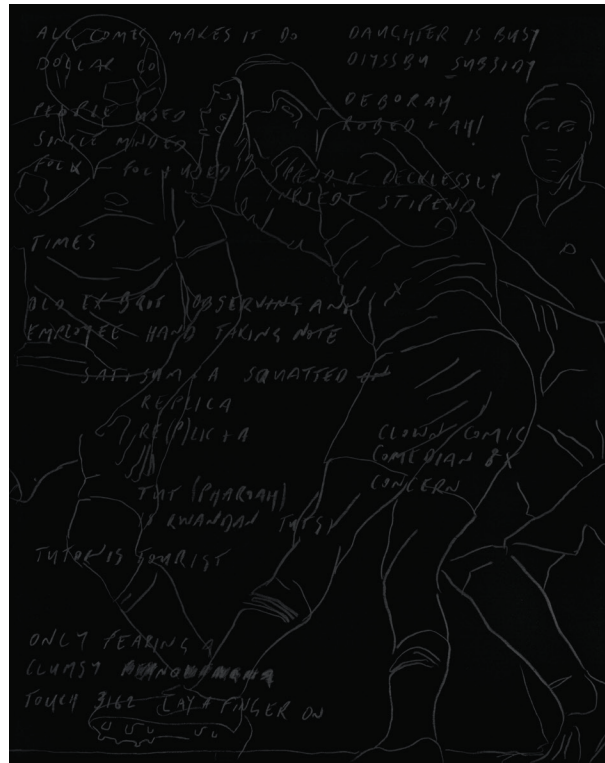
As Australian art historian Terry Smith has noted, many contemporary artists are concerned with issues of time, and more specifically: "what is it to be 'with time' these days – to be, in a word, contemporary?"²

Artists engage with time in a multitude of ways. Perkins' approach is esoteric and personal. Through a gesture as simple as completing a crossword clue or selecting a picture from the twenty-four hour media cycle, Perkins' paintings record both the passage of time and the complexity of the world we live in.

The mass-proliferation of images and information via the internet and social media means we can never apprehend every piece of news on any single day. Choosing what to paint and then painting it is a creative response to this dilemma, a way of exerting control. As Kathryn Chiong has acknowledged, even Kawara's date paintings were not purely objective: "What Kawara's work reveals, is that no amount of facticity escapes art's fundamentally fictive condition."³ Nor are Perkins' works reliable documents of time; rather they can be understood as the artist's way of making sense of the present, or perhaps, to paraphrase Eliot, his attempt to slow down to the still point and enjoy the dance.

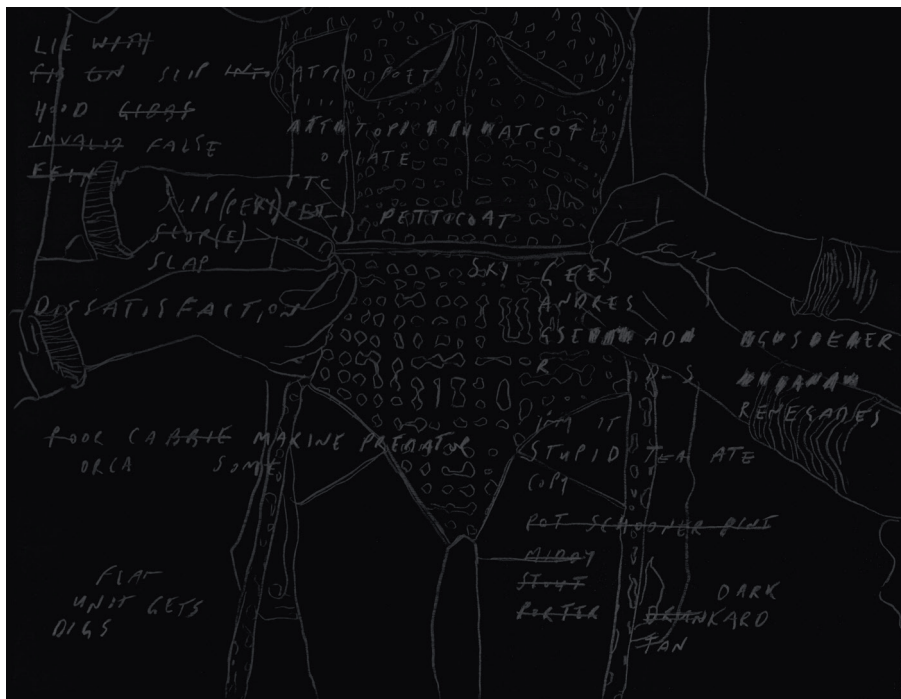
by Hamish Sawyer

1. Interview with the artist, 18 December 2019
2. Smith, Terry. *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 2011, Laurence King Publishing, London, p.296
3. Chiong, Kathryn. 'Kawara on Kawara,' *October* Volume 90 (Autumn 1999), MIT Press, Cambridge, p. 57



2 September 2019 (Alex was clumsy and Deborah was reckless;
 their happiness was tourist), 2019.
 122 x 152 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$2,800



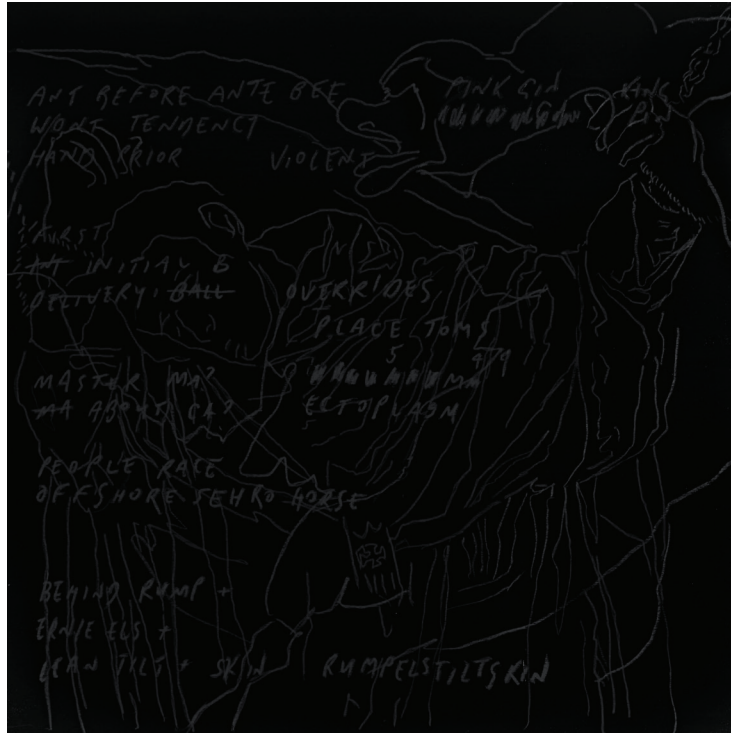
17 September 2019 (the poetry of cubal heels and petticoats), 2019.
 152 x 122 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$2,800



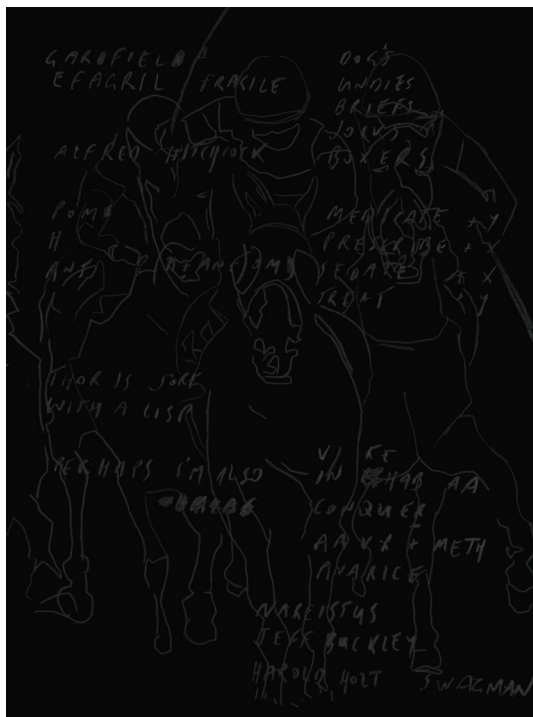
21 September 2019 (I'll come back when the next illusion has started), 2019.
121 x 60 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$1,500



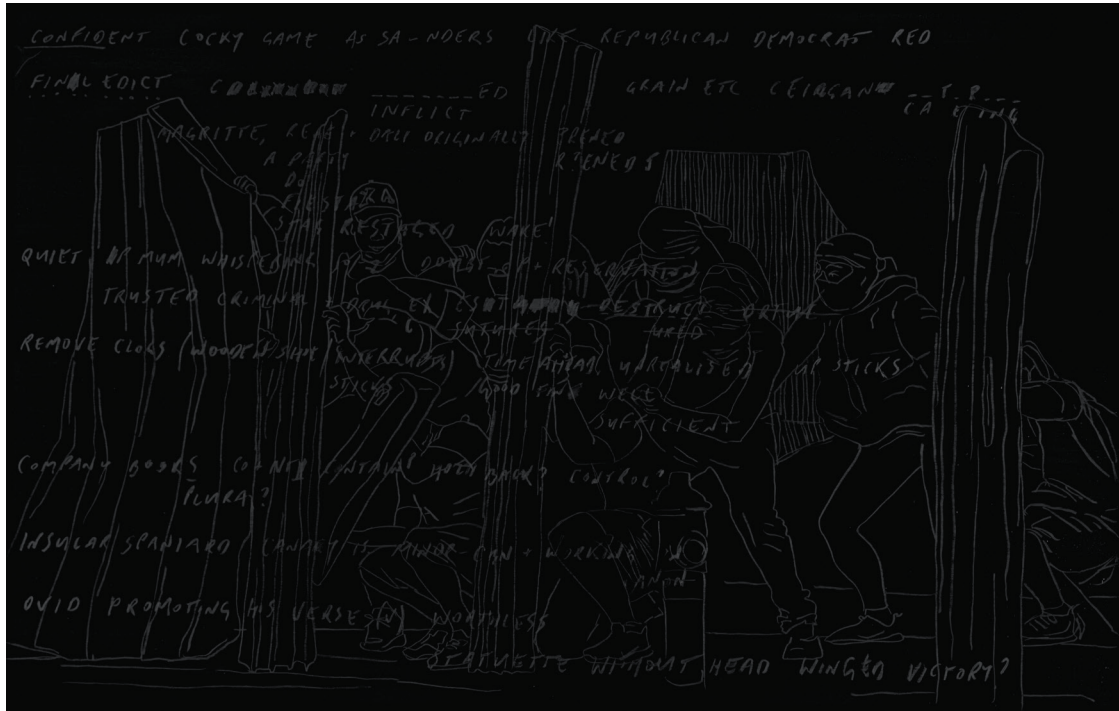
22 October 2019 (Velázquez, left, and Rumpelstiltskin, right, in visual rhyme), 2019.
102 x 102 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$1,900



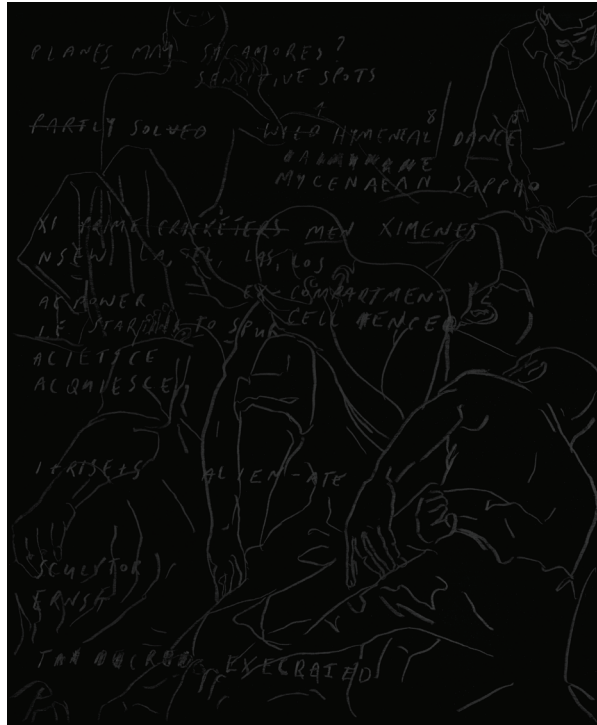
4 November 2019 (perhaps I'm also a pom-pom phenomenon), 2019.
 120 x 92 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$1,950



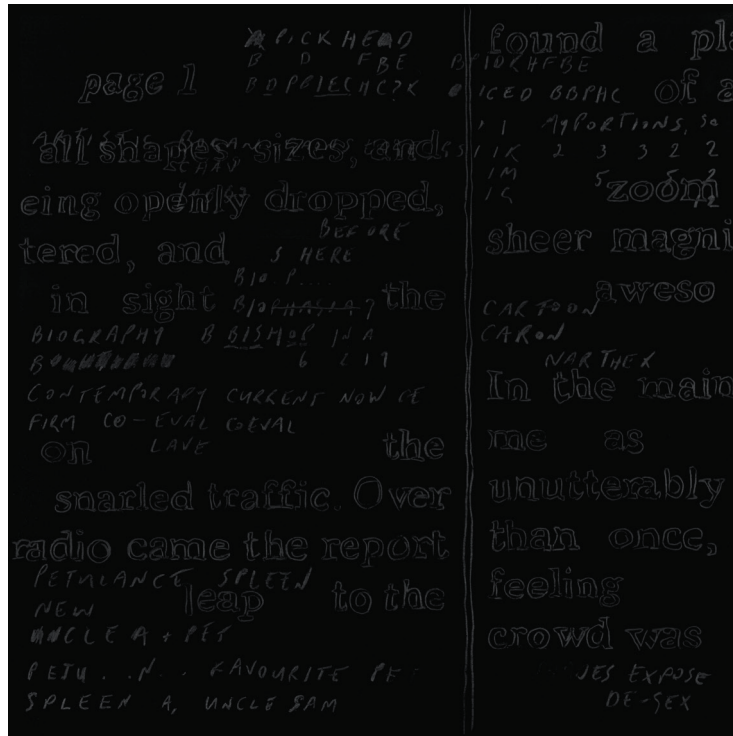
7 November 2019 (stick whispers to whispers and pronounce a manifesto), 2019.
 137 x 213 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$3,500



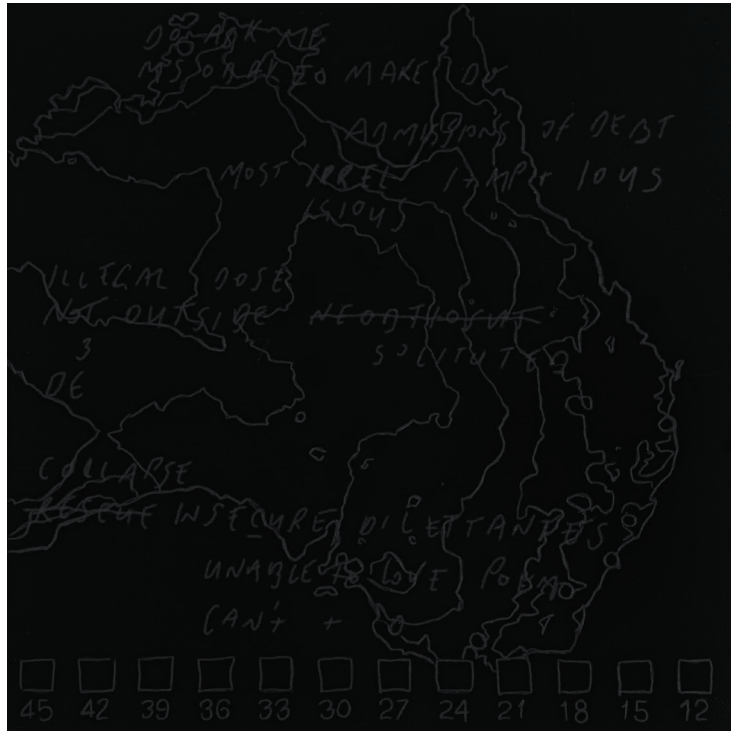
17 November 2019 (soil, sycamores and irises), 2019.
128 x 106 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$2,300



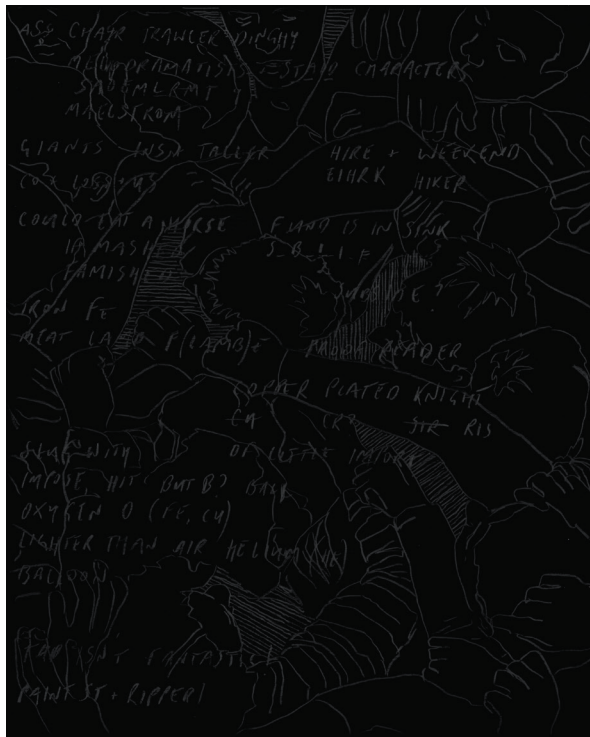
6 December 2019 (here the rolling sphere, there the edge), 2019.
 122 x 122 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$2,400



19 December (IOU), 2019.
91 x 91 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$1,650



4 January 2020 (the same staid characters in a new year's maelstrom), 2020.
137 x 122 cm, oil pastel and acrylic paint on polyester.

\$2,450

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