

A CATALOGUE OF PAINTINGS AND REVIEWS FROM
'CONSTANT WITHIN THE CHANGE'

2014

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The Springtime Book Launch and Exhibition at Clifford Chance, London 10/3/14- 4/5/14

8th April Reception

I am indebted to Clifford Chance for their invitation and hosting of the 2014 Spring time celebration of my book launch and exhibition, which displayed a modest selection of thirty eight paintings from the past five decades. I cannot thank Jane Hindley and Nigel Frank enough for their expertise, professionalism, hard work behind the scenes and for their kindness, they were a pleasure to work with. Nigel was superb in his care in organizing the collection, hanging the exhibition and the return of the paintings to my studio.

Sir Norman Rosenthal's generous and wholly supportive opening at the commencement of the evening reception, set a tone of knowledge, insight, provocation and recollections that provided an introductory context to the 200 guests, the organisers and myself. Following his speech, I then attempted to convey my respect and appreciation to Norman, Jane, Nigel and the Clifford Chance staff, and all persons present and indeed absent. I emphasised in particular, the book team, without whom my book would not have happened quite the way it did. Stamatis Zografos the designer, and Sam Cornish the editor and co- author were amazing and fabulous to work with over the past three years. At the beginning of 2014, Myrto and George Lazopoulou from Digitalarte constructed my website and also took photographs at the event. They're contributions were invaluable.

The book itself germinated over ten years ago when I first began my website, in order to collect and collate for my paintings, all images and information dating from the early sixties to recent times. Then in 2010, in Geneva, Francois Grandchamp and Weijing des Raux suggested that I begin a Catalogue Raisonne. I thought naively that I could do the whole thing myself on my computer and in word, that is, until I was put straight by Steffi Sachsenmaier, who said, "let me introduce you to my friend, Stamatis". And since then with our regular meetings he was always consistent with superb insights, quickness, suggestions, and understanding, having a really good eye, sharp and observant. He has a knowingness and a creative approach to his designer skills that were a joy, although more often than not and especially to the close of the whole project intense concentration of decisions and details increased. Sam –editor and author has been equally meticulous in checking out the development of the books progress. He has contributed so much to make this project successful with an impressive thoroughness, insight and creative suggestions, sympathetic, critical and ever astute. Both Sam and Stamatis continue to follow through with my projects in every detail.

I consider myself so lucky that the authors involved in my comprehensive catalogue have given so much of their time, generosity and interest. I thank them for their individual insights and particularity of interests in my paintings. I am hugely thankful to Hilary Spurling, Matt Collings, Terence Maloon, Sam Cornish and Steffi Sachsenmaier. They have in their different ways opened up a re focus of the various aspects of what my paintings have been about over the past five and a half decades.

The exhibition closed with a concert afternoon organized by my son Ben and daughter Emma, which provided another very memorable dimension, to the audience and myself. From beginning to the end of this event, the opening and closing occasions, all meant a great deal to me, particularly because so many treasured people family and friends were there.

Lastly my thanks to the sponsors for their help towards the partial funding of my two volume "Constant Within The Change", in particular Karim Mian and Alan Wheatley.

Gary Wragg,
October 25th 2014.



Publication in Two Volumes of:

Constant Within The Change

GARY WRAGG

Five Decades of Paintings
A Comprehensive Catalogue

Texts by
Hilary Spurling
Matthew Collings
Terence Maloon
Sam Cornish
Stefanie Sachsenmaier

EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION BY SAM CORNISH

This exhibition celebrates the publication by Sansom & Company of *Constant Within The Change: Gary Wragg: Five Decades of Paintings: A Comprehensive Catalogue*

Gary Wragg (b. 1946) is one of the most inventive and original abstract painters of his generation. *Constant Within The Change* surveys his contribution to abstraction and allows the variety and depth of his work to be recognised. The exhibition at Clifford Chance plays a similar role. Wragg held a five year retrospective at the Herbert Art Gallery in 1983 and displayed a decade's worth of paintings at Flowers Gallery in 2003, but this is the first time paintings from each decade from the sixties until the present have been displayed together. Both book and exhibition will be revelatory – perhaps especially for the artist himself.

Wragg came to prominence with two dramatic solo exhibitions at the Acme Gallery, in 1976 and 1979. He worked gesturally with charcoal direct on canvas - *Pirate*, the earliest large-scale work shown here, was one of the highlights. Bryan Robertson, a long-term supporter of Wragg's art, and to whom *Constant Within The Change* is dedicated, later wrote:

'those of us who saw it will never forget the occasion. The show contained some large paintings which were more than worthy of the Tate Gallery or New York's Museum of Modern Art. Among other collectors, Charles Saatchi bought one of the largest and finest paintings. The Gallery was filled with crowds of young people relishing the arrival of a highly personal visual language which added new and unexpected dimensions to abstract expressionism. Since then, Wragg's paintings have moved on, evolving always through the artist's expanding awareness of the physical world and his unerring truthfulness to more than one layer of experience. Maturity has not lessened that early raw but sophisticated impact which seems with time to be more concentrated than ever. Wragg at his best adds a peculiar richness and force to contemporary art; his work as a painter and his example for younger artists make a total nonsense of fashionable orthodoxy, whatever its guise.'



As Robertson was aware, here Abstract Expressionism is a type of permission rather than a stylistic straitjacket. Wragg values the paintings of earlier modernists Bonnard or Matisse as highly, and includes, amongst others, Titian, Goya and Rembrandt in what he calls his 'treasure chest of art'. For him painting's past is a vast store of inspiration and suggestion that can be approached freely. His paintings spring from this ground unpredictably and he delights in unexpected, even contradictory or contrary solutions.

Wragg is intent on maintaining an open situation, one in which different attitudes and approaches linger or are looped back to, are turned about and put back into play. This is most dramatically apparent in his large-scale paintings, where he can fully unravel the diversity of influences and impressions he brings to his art. To keep this unraveling active – to prevent it overwhelming him and us, as it often threatens to do – he has to work nimbly and keep on his toes, or perhaps feel he is just about to lose his balance. In this vein, he has described Tai Chi, of which he is one of Europe's leading teachers and practitioners, as being about 'trying to keep the edge on chaos, often when things seem to be falling to bits.' The diverse layers of an individual painting may take months and often years to accumulate but Wragg tends to paint in sporadic, disconnected bursts. He aims to cultivate moments of clarity out of distraction, and this seems like a good description of our response to his paintings.

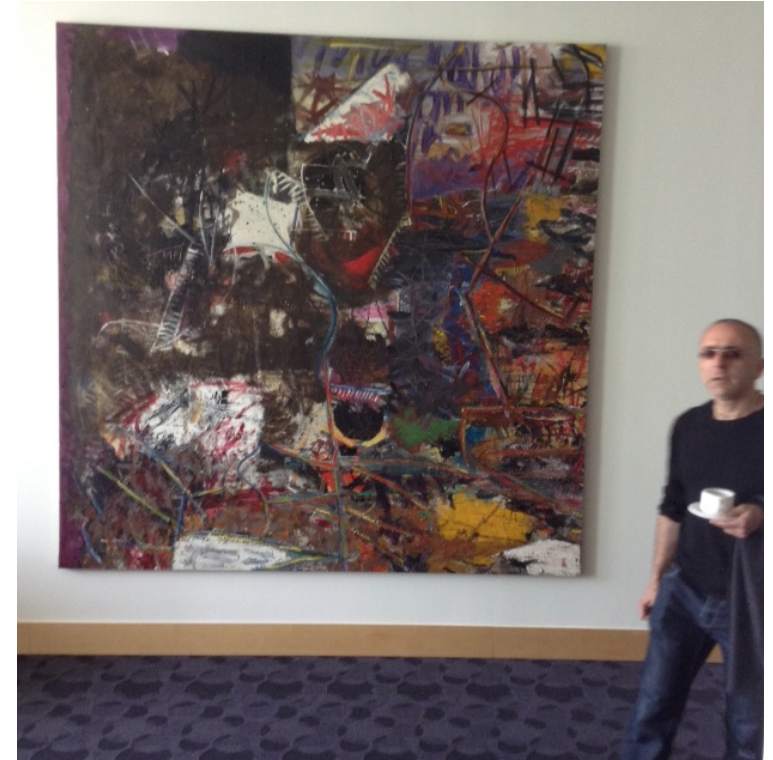
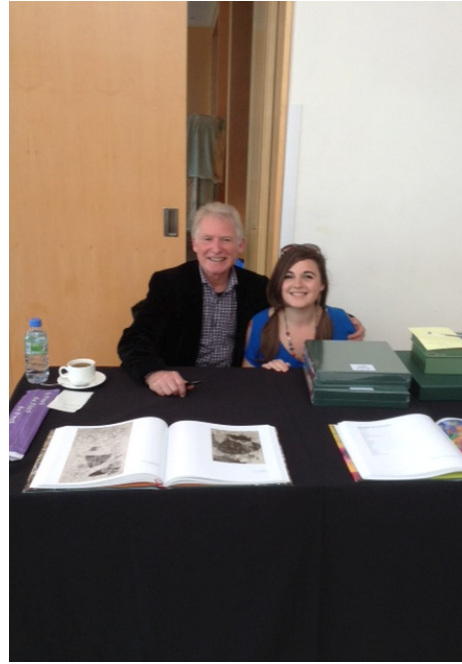
Often when one is immersed, even lost, within the complexity of one of Wragg's paintings, a mark or set of marks suddenly seems to take on a new character. As they do this they shift and open up a space, and within this space assert themselves: it is within these revealed spaces that the force of his gesture takes on its greatest resonance. This quality of emergence, of images rising up to meet the viewer is what is valuable about Wragg's art, those moments when he is able to make the garrulous laconic and snatch the precise from the haphazard.



8TH OF APRIL OPENING OF THE EVENT BY SIR NORMAN ROSENTHAL AND
FOLLOWING SPEECH BY GARY WRAGG







PAINTINGS FROM THE EXHIBITION IN SEQUENTIAL HANGING ORDER



Untitled, 1982
Acrylic, Charcoal and Pastel on Canvas
32" x 32" (81 x 81 cm)



Pirate, 1976
Charcoal, Acrylic and Rohplex on Canvas
96" x 123" (244 x 312 cm)



Magician's Hand, 1984
Acrylic and Mixed Media on Canvas
97" x 120" (246 x 305 cm)



Blue, Beige & Green Circuit, 2012-3
Acrylic and Charcoal on Canvas
96" x 105" (244 x 267 cm)



Bending Zones & Shifting Accents (Magician's Hand II), 2005-6
Oil on Canvas
98" x 120" (249 x 305 cm)



The Gap III, 1990
Oil on Canvas
99" x 126" (251 x 320 cm)



Vyner St I, 2004
Oil on Canvas
73" x 127" (185 x 323 cm)



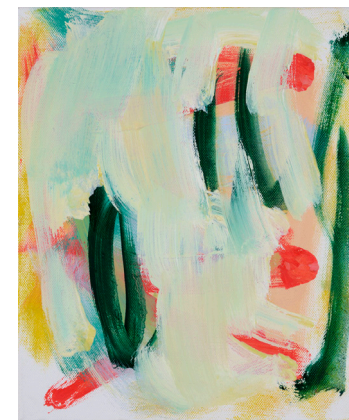
The Joining & Rotation of Edges, 1998-9
Oil on Canvas
98" x 78" (249 x 198 cm)



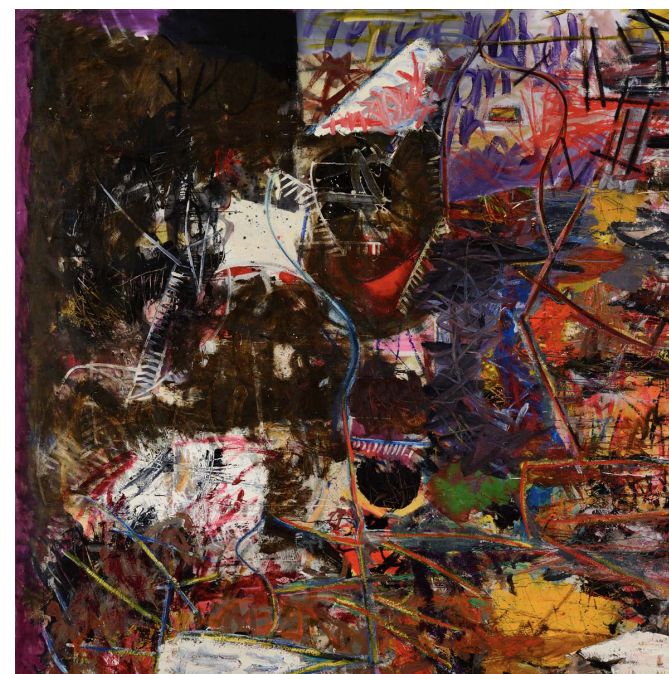
Four Corners (Red & Yellow), 1998-2008
Oil on Canvas
51 1/5" x 42 1/5" (130 x 107 cm)



Stepladder 6, Vertical Series, 1996-7
Oil on Canvas
75 1/2" x 32 1/2" (192 x 83 cm)



Natural Limits, 2012
Oil on Canvas
12" x 10" (30 x 24 cm)



The Snake & Crane I, 1987-89
Oil, Oil Pastel and Oil Stick on Canvas
96 1/2" x 96" (245 x 244 cm)
Private Collection of Alan Wheatley, London



The Studio III, 1989
Oil on Canvas
77" x 88" (196 x 224 cm)



Chi XXIII, 1994-5
Oil on Canvas
36" x 26" (91 x 66 cm)

Salmon Pink Interior, 1969
Acrylic on Canvas
40" x 33" (102 x 84 cm)



Light Green Interior, 1969
Acrylic and Fluorescent Paint on Canvas
40" x 30" (102 x 76 cm)

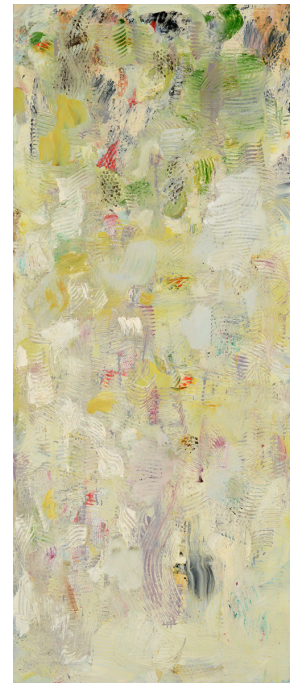




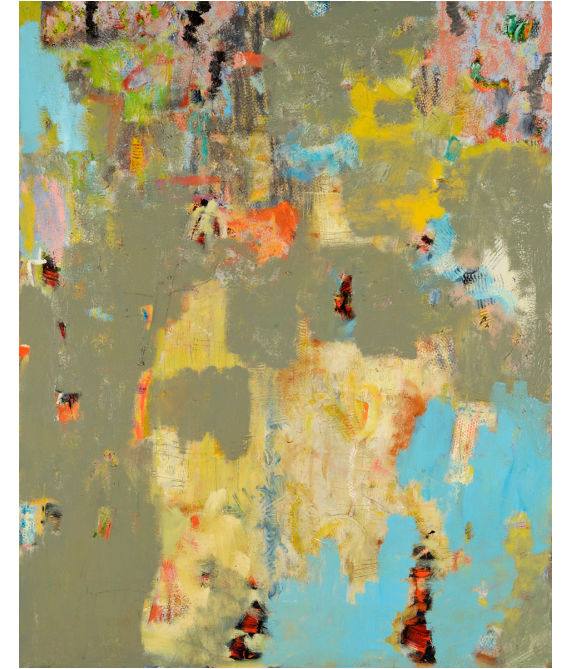
Louse Point Homage, 1997
Oil on Canvas
81" x 67" (206 x 170 cm)



Ground Flight II, 1980
Acrylic and Charcoal on Canvas
38" 1/2 x 36" (98 x 91 cm)



Oval Works I, Vertical Series, White, 1996-7
Oil on Canvas
78" x 33" (198 x 84 cm)



Earth Yellow Metamorphosis, 1997-9
Oil on Canvas
104" x 83" (264 x 211 cm)



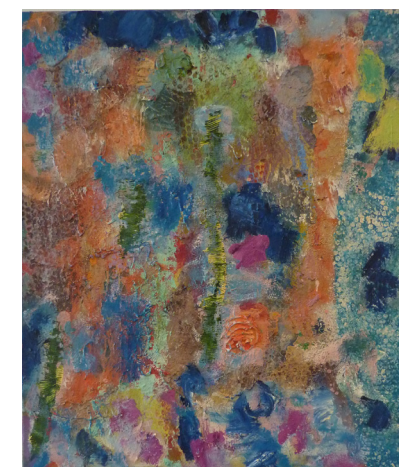
Within Black, 2006
Oil on Canvas
35 1/2" x 35 1/2" (90 x 90 cm)



Cloud Hands, 1991
Oil and Charcoal on Linen
70" x 119" (178 x 302 cm)



Saltinbanque, 1986
Oil and Mixed Media on Canvas
66" x 55" (168 x 140 cm)



Untitled, 1998-9
Oil on Canvas
36" x 30" (91 x 76 cm)



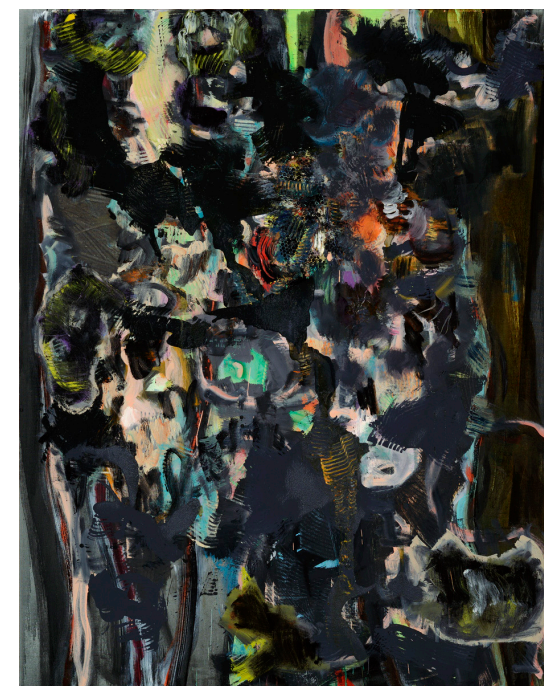
Abandonment & Doubt, 2006-9
Oil on Canvas
39 1/2" x 39 1/2" (100 x 100 cm)



Abandonment & Doubt, 2006-9
Oil on Canvas
39 1/2" x 39 1/2" (100 x 100 cm)



Vertical, Horizontal & Concentric, 1981
Acrylic and Charcoal on Canvas
42" x 24" (107 x 61 cm)



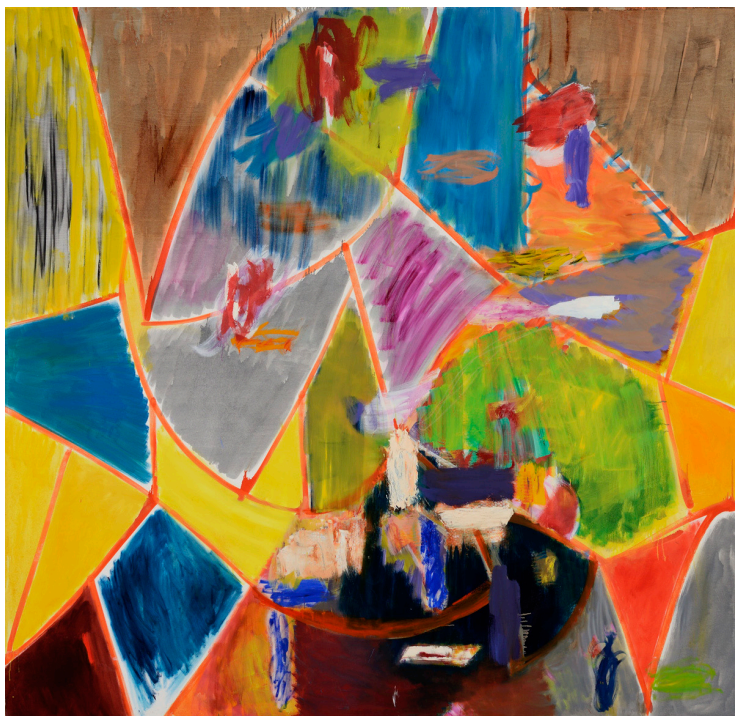
Partita, 2002
Oil on Canvas
82" x 65" (208 x 165 cm)



Eddie's Café, 2005
Oil on Canvas
82" x 79" (208 x 201 cm)



Coming or Going, 2012
Oil on Canvas
12" x 10" (30 x 24 cm)



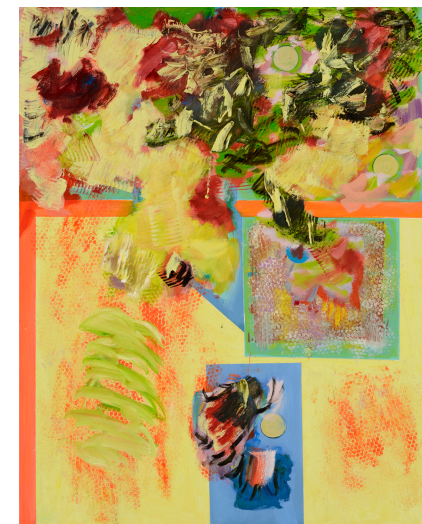
Webzones @ Vyner St, 2005
Oil on Canvas
103" x 106" (262 x 269 cm)



Windows & Wedges, 1987
Oil, Charcoal, Oil Pastel and Oil Stick on Canvas
92" x 80" (234 x 203 cm)



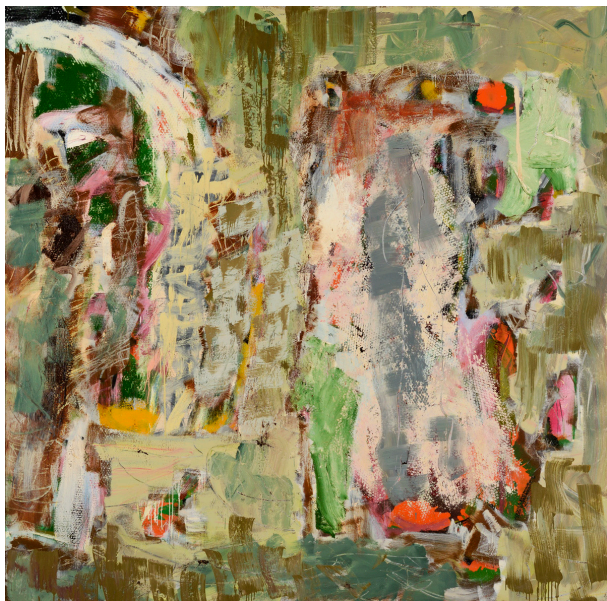
Yellow Edge (Box Acropolis Remnant), 2009-10
Oil on Canvas
59" x 47" (150 x 119 cm)



Orange Edge, Yellow & Green (Box Acropolis Remnant), 2009-10
Oil on Canvas
59" x 47" (150 x 119 cm)



Shutters & Ears, 1977-8
Acrylic and Rohplex on Canvas
104" x 69" (264 x 175 cm)



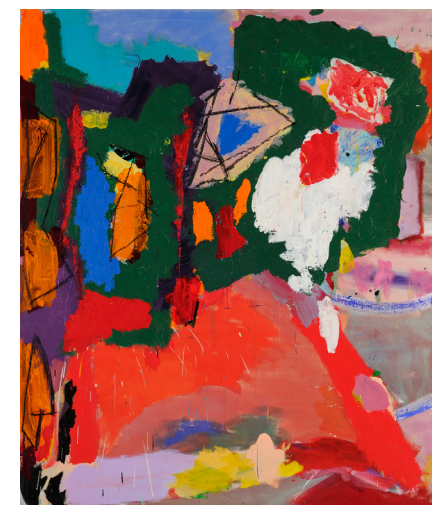
Still Life with Golden Bream: Homage to Goya, 1994-5
 Oil on Canvas
 96" x 97" (244 x 246 cm)



Chi XX, 1994-5
 Oil on Canvas
 99" x 122" (251 x 310 cm)



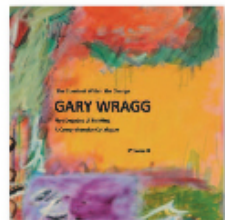
Pilanch, 2014
 Oil on Canvas
 31" 1/2 x 23" 1/2 (80 x 60 cm)



Caribbean Circuit, 1982
 Acrylic and Chacoal on Canvas
 79" x 67" (201 x 170 cm)
 Private Collection of Alan Wheatley, London

REVIEWS

10 GALLERIES JULY 2014



BOOKreviews summer reads

Director's Choice: Mauritshuis by Emilie E.S. Gordonker. 80pp, ill. throughout, Scala pbk, £9.95. 'The Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis' is a real gem amongst European museums, housed in a classic 17th C. building in The Hague and with an outstanding collection of Dutch and Flemish Golden Age masterpieces. And what a collection it is – Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*, Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and *View of Delft* and works by Holbein, Hals, Steen, Rubens, Ruisdael, Avercamp and many more.

In this engaging, compact book, Director Emilie Gordonker comments on around 35 of her personal favourites, reproduced one per spread (often with a blown-up detail). A neat idea, well executed – look out for other titles in the series. **AA**

Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary 1926-1938, ed. by Anne Umland. The Museum of Modern Art, New York via Thames & Hudson, hbk, 256pp, 225 col ill, £45.

In this handsome book, essays by seven authors skillfully explore Magritte's early Surrealist evolution. Visionary experiences triggered his mysterious

awareness of such mundane marvels as floorboards, mouldings on walls and leaf veins. Disquietingly juxtaposed, such elements were metamorphosed into ominous pictorial paradoxes: lovers kissing swathed in face-obliterating sheets, 'large clouds' . . . crawling over the ground', bacon on a plate with an eerily transfixing human eye at its centre.

The story of his commission for three paintings (1937-38) in Edward James's spectacularly bizarre London house, is entrancingly told; the first photo of Magritte in his persona as bowler-hatted man was taken there. **Philip Vann**

Constant within the change: Gary Wragg – Five Decades of Paintings: A comprehensive catalogue, 2 vols, Sansom and Co hbk, £110.

This book includes over 500 illustrations as well as short, erudite essays by Hilary Spurling, Terence Maroon, Matthew Collins, Stefanie Sachsenmaier and Sam Cornish.

However, the contributions throughout by the Artist himself are also refreshingly clear and to the point: 'I feel the inner voice in painting will always prevail,

regardless of shifts in established taste in art."

Wragg's Art is optimistic as well as accomplished and this publication will hopefully reach a new generation of painters. The final word should be given to Bryan Robertson (quoted by Sam Cornish). Wragg's paintings "do not reveal themselves at first glance; they not only repay prolonged study, they demand it." **Chris Insole**

Art and the Second World War by Monica Bohm-Duchen. 288pp, 215 ill, Lund Humphries hbk, £40.

A far-reaching overview of the artistic response to the conflict, from the prelude Spanish Civil War to the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan. A dozen chapters discuss art in most of the major combatant nations including China and the Commonwealth, providing the most wide-ranging treatment of the subject available in English.

The big names and official schemes are present of course, but especially welcome is the coverage of lesser known images and artists, not least the work of civilian internees, POWs and other camp inmates. Well illustrated, extensively researched and highly approachable. **AA**

Modernism Without Irony: The Paintings of Gary Wragg

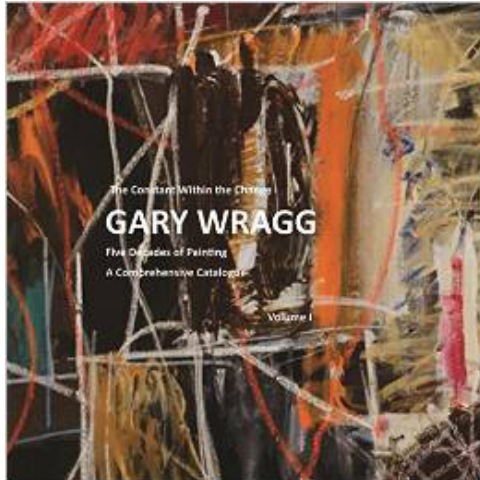
by Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann on August 9, 2014



Gary Wragg, "Studio III" (1989), oil on canvas, 77 x 88 in (all images via garywraggstudio.co.uk)

In 1978, the esteemed British curator Bryan Robertson saw fit to compare the promise of painter Gary Wragg's emergent career with that of the young Jackson Pollock. It is a comparison lent some weight by the fact that Robertson had written a monograph and organized a major exhibition devoted to Pollock's work when he was Director of London's Whitechapel Gallery.

Quoted within the pages of the recent two-volume survey of Wragg's career, however, the comparison jars. The career of the English painter has been considerably longer and more sustained than his American predecessor (the survey, *Constant Within The Change: Gary Wragg, Five Decades of Paintings: A Comprehensive Catalogue* by Sam Cornish, spans from very early pre-student works of 1963 through to 2013), but what will certainly strike the reader is Wragg's failure to achieve an appreciable level of international recognition. Indeed, while it was likely that Wragg's innovative expansion of painting's medium-specific possibilities underlay Robertson's excitement, these self-same qualities might be taken to account for Wragg's relative obscurity today.

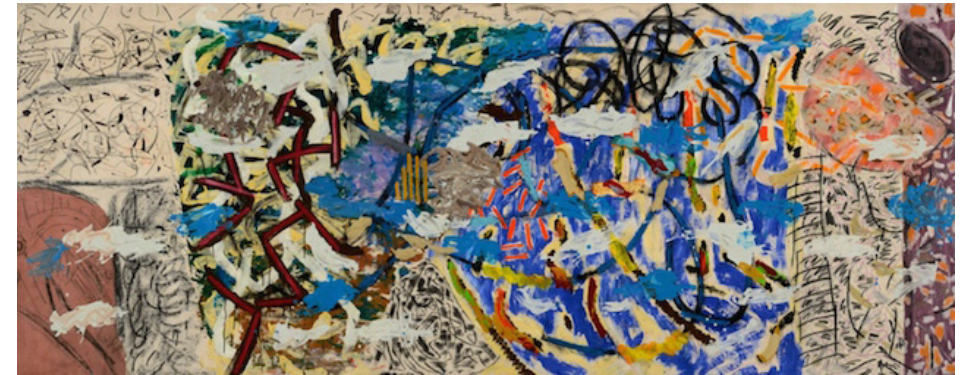


Emanating from the other side of the neo-liberal takeover, the rise of post-structuralist criticism, and the expansion of a global art market pumped full of post-Modernist irony and post-minimalist literalism, Robertson's statement reveals the extent to which the common sense assumptions of the 1970s art world have been torn apart. Within this new paradigm, Wragg, like many of his generation of British painters, holds an awkward position: too young to be welcomed into the ranks of Great British Modernists (Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, Anthony Caro, Bridget Riley, et al), he has nonetheless developed his own particular mode of 'unfashionably late Modernism' across the best part of half-a-century.

The strength of the work grouped within the catalogue offers a challenge to the consensus of fashion. Wragg's work reminds us of the considerable wealth and range of work that stands excluded from the record. Looking back to the works on which his career was launched, the signs of his strengths and future concerns are in ample supply. In "Promenade" of 1978, for example, an Abstract Expressionist sense of scale and gesture fuse with an interest in Color Field's drifts, shared with many of his generation. But from the outset Wragg's channeling of tradition steers clear of the many dangers and caricatured deficiencies embodied in these starting points.

Rather than fixed formats or object-defying endgames, Wragg brings together a dizzying cacophony of assertions: the charged color relations of the central passage, the angularity

of the stickman-like form merging into a neo-Cubist grid, the cartoonish ladder and the graffiti-like arabesques whose casualness belies their subtle relation to the underlying tectonic ruptures. Individually these features call to mind a whole range of Modernist forbearers — from Picasso and Matisse, through Alan Davie, David Bomberg, Mark Rothko, Jack Tworkov, and Willem de Kooning — but the playfulness and Baroque insouciance with which they are overlain is quite distinct.



Gary Wragg, "Promenade" (1978), acrylic, pastel, charcoal, and Rohplex on canvas, 70 x 175 in. Combining a sense of contingency and a wide-ranging field of reference, with an undisputedly Modernist sincerity and faith in painterly meaning, Wragg finds liberation, in the "treasure chest" of historical precedent. As Sam Cornish's essay points out, such an approach offers proof "that it is [still] possible to approach — to feel part of — the most ambitious examples of modernism without totalizing or unfeeling irony, and without repeating or being subservient to the past."

A wide-ranging engagement with the history of art extends throughout Wragg's career, with Matisse's framing, the lure of geometry, the tension between gesture, contour and space, and all sorts of notations for painterly drifts, forming some of the more recurrent preoccupations across the years. Despite this, Wragg has steered clear of the formalist insularity to which much late Modernism has been prone. His pronounced receptivity to a diverse range of "external" sources has no doubt been crucial in this. An interest in process shared with many of his generation, for example, has seen Wragg use anything from impressed bubble wrap to paced Tai Chi steps to provide pictorial effects and compositional structures (see "The Oval," 1996–97, and "Separate Foot," 1991–2003).

He has also channeled visual experiences — with the shifting transition between his studio and the outside world over the course of the day finding form in his long-running series of “Gap” paintings, and the fragmented impressions and degraded surfaces of the urban environment looming large over much of his work (see, for example, “The Snake & Crane I,” 1987-89). Likewise, a broad and nuanced sensitivity to light and diverse color harmonies can be detected across the career. These departure points are never looked upon as ends — and identifying them rarely affects our interaction with the work — nonetheless, they provide ever-renewing sources for the continued vitality and exploration of a career that for all its learned reference has never veered into aloof academicism.

Wragg’s consistent open-endedness no doubt carries with it some attendant risks — the possibility of over-complication and dwindling clarity, for example — but what is remarkable is the extent to which, across many years, he has succeeded in pulling clarity and success from the melée of options thrown up by his practice. Such success is embedded in Wragg’s means of working, in which complex layers of quite divergent assertions are built up over extended time, with an intriguing admixture of intense contemplation and more casual improvisation. Wragg’s approach to layering pays tribute to his conviction that painting is a process of “cultivation, rather than expression.”



Gary Wragg, “The Gap II” (1990), oil on canvas, 105 x 126 in

Instead of repositories for direct expressive or emotional appeal, or the one-hit image that fellow abstract painter John Hoyland once advised him to develop, Wragg’s paintings thrive in their ability to transcend image. They lure us into their complex, overlapping webs of assertion: spatial, gestural, textural and chromatic — micro and macro. As Matthew Collings’s contribution to the catalogue points out, this cumulative layering separates Wragg from the heroic embodiments of selfhood so central to the Abstract Expressionist mythology of gesture, and places his work within a more fluid, and temporally contradictory realm. In a work like “The Studio III” (1989), we do not read gesture or action as definitive expressive moments, but instead follow their complex accumulation into a tentative and fragile totality — with an emergent sense of structure.

There is indeed something akin to what Collings terms “an art version of personality” here — but it arises from a complex blend of moments and underlying patterns, which never quite succeed in settling down into a singular framing. As with friends, our mode of interaction and apprehension is dynamic, suspended and multiply inflected — but not irresolute. Like Henri Lefebvre’s theory of moments, structure is posited as an organic and evolving entity, in a perpetual state of becoming.

Across his career, therefore, Wragg has engaged in a wide-ranging consideration of the Modernist tradition with a deep commitment to what, in an interview included within the catalogue, he calls the “wonderful streams of colour, combinations and movements of weights, drifts and all sorts of things that the magic of painting does — only painting, nothing else, not photography, not any other art form.”

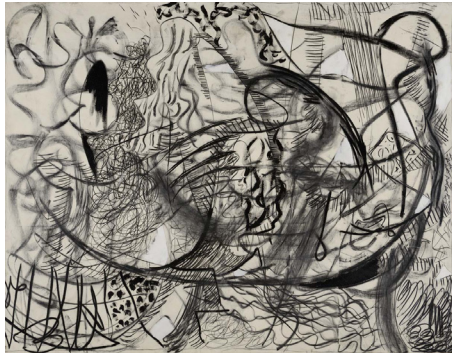
But in its open-ended field of reference, held in suspended and interlocking time, the work succeeds in updating that tradition. As the myriad contradictions and absurdities of the current relations between art and the wider world make themselves increasingly apparent, perhaps a crack may be opening up for the reassessment this work deserves. The current book provides a wonderful starting point.

Constant Within The Change: Gary Wragg, Five Decades of Paintings: A Comprehensive Catalogue by Sam Cornish is available from Samson and Company and other online booksellers.

2 April 2014

Constant Within The Change: Gary Wragg

Written by Dan Coombs



Pirate, 1976, charcoal, acrylic and Rohplex on canvas, 244 x 312cm

I entered the financial hyperzone via a mall of classy brands: Tiffany, Austin Reed, Hublot. I wondered – do the members of the one percent consider themselves rich members of the middle class, or representatives of a new aristocracy? Across the plazas around Canary Wharf public art is the way big corporations create symbols of aristocratic aspiration that complement the bourgeois facade. Examples include a gigantic fibreglass geranium, a torqued spine of jenga-like columns in alert tension, or Igor Mitoraj's Centaur (1984) half horse, half man, atop a plinth. The symbolic ideal of the mighty worker-aristocrat. I half expected to see a briefcase, an iphone, a tablet or jogging bottoms as part of the centaur's accoutrement, but the set-up was generalised – classical, nothing too demanding, in bronze, with a neutral finish matched only by the imperviousness of the endless straight edges of the surrounding office towers.

In the sun lounge on the thirtieth floor of Clifford Chance, the view through the plate glass windows over the Isle of Dogs was aeroplane high. Sun streamed into seating areas and small side rooms connected by vastly long corridors in a space designed for business gatherings. A grand piano, a dining room with crystal decanters, a kitchen at the centre of the floor where staff were beginning to prepare the canapés for this evening's function; this was the setting for a stately retrospective of Gary Wragg's paintings. His large works take the viewer round all

four sides of the building processionally. The sheer square footage at play has allowed Wragg to get a large number of his huge paintings together in one space. We get a sense of his development, and the changes his work has gone through.



The Snake & Crane I, 1987-89, oil, oil pastel and oil stick on canvas, 245 x 244cm

The paintings are abstract-expressionist and driven by a desire to use gesture and colour to open up a new space within each one. Sometimes this new space seems to take on a sense of place. Some of the paintings appear built on similar principles to de Kooning's 1956 painting Easter Monday in the Met in New York, an urban abstract landscape complete with windswept newspaper, painted when de Kooning was still an urbanite who wandered alone through the city streets. Some of Wragg's paintings express something of the texture of urban existence. The Snake and Crane I (1987-89) has found its own contingent hard-won structure and contains something of the surprise and sense of juxtaposition that can be seen in the corresponding aerial overview through the windows. The painting is dark and brooding and conveys the sensation of moving through a city at night. It would be interesting to compare it to the almost contemporaneous urban landscape / portrait by Basquiat Untitled (Skull) (1984). Wragg's painting would undoubtedly seem more lyrical, less blunt than the Basquiat, but also more romantic, more elusive, more like Turner.

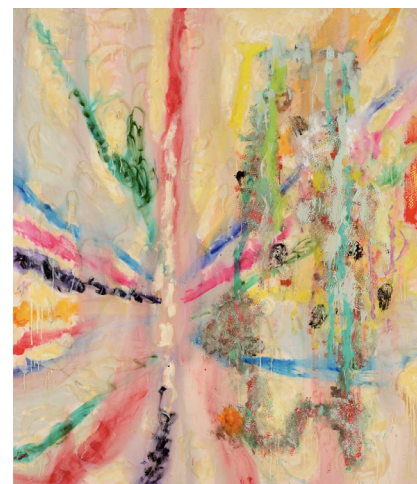


Abandonment & Doubt, 2006-9, oil on canvas, 100 x 100cm

The problem, the crisis, the urgency of Wragg's work emanate directly from his drawing. The importance of drawing to him is inaugurated by a 1976 charcoal on canvas *Pirate*. In it, various figurative and landscape motifs are hinted at but never resolved. Like early Pollock, the drawing points out of representation toward oceanic all-overness. The difficult negotiation between the general and the specific here is not necessarily resolved. It sets the tone for the rest of the show, where we can never be sure what it is we are looking at. Though it is clear that the paintings are meant to be apprehended literally as tableaux of marks, shapes and colours, we still can't help imagining contexts, motifs, encounters and relationships within the compositions and can't help looking for answers as to how the paintings have come about. Sometimes place names are referenced in the titles. At other times the paintings seem like a mixture of both internal and external architecture, as in *Abandonment and Doubt* (2006-9). Though we may look for clues as to how the paintings are configured, we're unable to pull away and attach particular meanings to any of the components. The paintings are sticky: once you're absorbed, it's hard to extract yourself.

English painting often likes to put its feelings into objects and treat them as elements within a still life. Howard Hodgkin for example, is able to twist the brush into a hot gesture, but the placing of gesture within the composition is balanced more coldly. His paintings have

a detachment, as though a moment's emotional imprint has been placed under glass. In contrast it's harder to get any distance from a Wragg. They fill the viewer's visual field both optically and physically. They demand full submersion and create an immersive field. Because of this they can never fully master themselves, as to master the painting would entail stepping out of it and Wragg wants to keep us on the inside. The paintings attempt to pull themselves together out of the chaos of pure immediate sensation, and Wragg often achieves this in the handling of the paint, which is totally involved and boundlessly energetic. The problem for him is finding the right armature for his gestures. What is the function of drawing in his work? *Stepladder & Standing Man*, 1996, acrylic and oil on canvas, 236 x 206cm

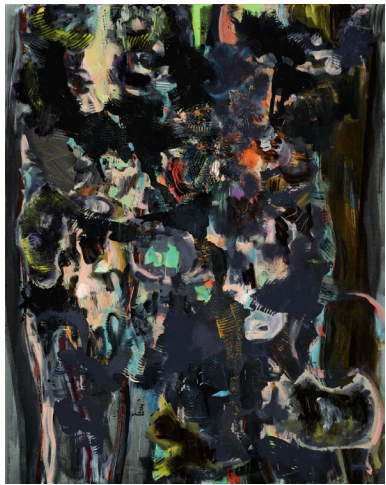


Stepladder & Standing Man, 1996, acrylic and oil on canvas, 236 x 206cm

When he draws on his canvases, is he drawing in actual space, or virtual space? Is he 1-1 literal, or shifting scale and creating illusions? Is he describing a thing or creating a process? Are the forms his own or found elsewhere? If they are found elsewhere, are they from nature, from the collective unconscious, from the urban landscape? Or from the work of historic painters, or the works of other abstract painting colleagues in London? Wragg seems to want a similar quality to that found in the paintings of Gillian Ayres or the work of the sculptor Phyllida Barlow, where an ugly brutal literalness gives way to a paradoxical delicacy. At times the paintings can feel bootsy and masculine, emphasised by the striated grooves he often draws into the thick paint with a plasterer's tool, making of the painting a pitched battleground.

At other times he seems to want a fragrant bouquet of colours that open out and bloom in a sweet array. Underpinning all this is the underlying problem of drawing, of structure and composition. How to find a composition, how to organise the raw material? Should the initial drawing bend itself to accommodate the new structures thrown up by the painting, to eventually simply be painted out, to let the layers of paint speak for themselves? Or should the painting be divided up, with drawing creating boundaries between elements, in order to impose a structural rigour around which the gestures can organise themselves?

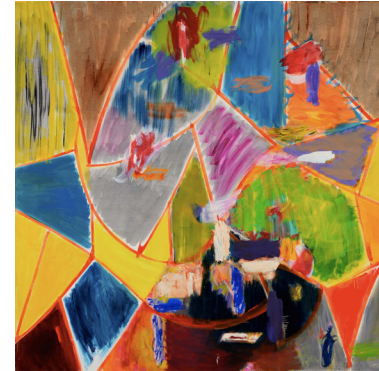
Partita, 2002, oil on canvas, 208 x 165cm



Partita, 2002, oil on canvas, 208 x 165cm

The kinds of meanings involved in conceptual or symbolic art are entirely absent here. What we're involved with are more fundamental conditions of being – orientation, direction, velocity and energy. It would be tempting to describe the process that goes into making Wragg's paintings as performative, were it not for the fact that the emphasis is so entirely upon the painting as a finished product, as an object that lives beyond the fact of its maker's existence. What is impressive (or brave, or gruelling depending on your taste) about Wragg's work is his refusal to pin anything down and to let all the elements remain as open as possible, for as long as possible. Wragg has truly turned painting into a trip into the unknown, and it is the extraordinary energy that is required to undertake such a mission that makes the whole show irresistible. Wragg has let himself go all out to explore what is possible for him within

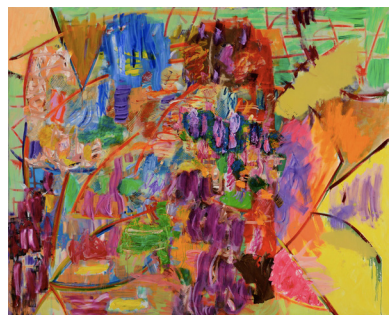
the vortex of abstract expressionist action painting. Yet despite early success he occupies a surprisingly marginal position within the London art world. Despite the obvious enjoyment and enthusiasm the paintings elicit, they remain ignored and out of fashion. Why?



Webzones @ Vyner St, 2005, oil on canvas, 262 x 269cm

Part of the reason perhaps is that in their reliance on the gesture, the paintings could be associated with an era where paintings were created out of a masculine will to power. He likes the viewer to feel the heft, weight and struggle of his intentions. Even when he prints paint onto the surface using bubble wrap one can still feel the physicality of the artist bearing down onto the painting. This is a characteristic of painting of the nineteen-fifties, before Warhol or Cage amongst others liberated art from being the product of a individual, isolated, heroic will. In only a couple of paintings in the show, such as Vyner Street (2005) or Partita (2002) does Wragg let the poured paint find its own form independently of his hand. Here, he comes close to the relatively non-interventionist abstract painting of Polke or Richter, where process, either by pooling chemicals, or effacing all the marks of the hand with a squeegee, serves to efface the will or ego of the artist, allowing the painting to becoming effervescent and veiled. Wragg's experiments in this vein are uncharacteristic though. There is something powerful about the way Wragg refuses to let go, refuses to give up possession of his motifs. Yet paradoxically the strongly willed nature of Wragg's paintings is at odds with their open-ended character. They don't give way to calculation, perfection or resolution and in this can seem frustrating. The hard wrought gestures however begin to make sense when you understand their struggle, despite appearances, is in fact towards a lightness of being,

and forms that at first might seem rasping actually give way to a dense pleasure in sensuous immediacy. They seem to embody what Maurice Denis once advised Matisse: "You should resign yourself to the fact that everything cannot be intelligible. Give up the idea of rebuilding a new art by means of reason alone. Put your trust in sensibility, in instinct." (1)



Bending Zones & Shifting Accents (Magician's Hand II), 2005-6, oil on canvas, 249 x 305cm

The most pervasive influence that I sensed throughout the work in the show was Bonnard, in the often rich, dense and highly pitched colours that offer oases of intensity and pleasure within a landscape that has become pure field. More recent works from the noughties are thinner in their texture and the drawing becomes more elastic; the grey triangle to the left of centre in Webzones @ Vyner Street (2005) is one of the most effortless moments in the show. Similarly the paintings on black grounds allow Wragg to make simpler, bolder forms. In Bending Zones and Shifting Accents (Magician's Hand II) (2005-6) the red swooping oil stick leaps from the surface of the painting like a firework, a crazy comet. Ultimately Wragg's paintings begin to work on you when you accept the disorientation and confusion and liminal uncertainty of their structures and give yourself over to the sheer exuberance and elation with which the paintings have been made. You have to accept their immediacy and understand that though they are static objects they exist within the moment. Within the neutral perfection and efficiency of the surrounding corporate environment, Wragg's paintings are ecstatic anomalies. He presents us with something that is a challenge to understanding. The paintings are hard to assimilate and undoubtedly would change within different contexts. To appreciate one completely, you would have to live with it and devote a whole wall to it. Then the painting

could just be, like birdsong, or the roar of traffic.

(1) Quoted in T.J.Clark "Madame Matisse's Hat", London Review of Books ,Vol.30 no.16,14 August 2008

The exhibition celebrates the publication of Constant Within The Change: Gary Wragg: Five Decades of Paintings: A Comprehensive Catalogue by John Sansom & Company. Two volumes in slipcase, each volume 240 pages, 280 x 280 mm. Edited by Sam Cornish, texts by Hilary Spurling, Matthew Collings, Terence Maloon, Sam Cornish and Stefanie Sachsenmaier.

Exhibition open until the 2nd of May by appointment only – contact jane.hindley@cliffordchance.com / 020 7006 5384. Clifford Chance, 10 Upper Bank Street, Canary Wharf

More information at www.garywraggstudio.co.uk

CV

Biography

1946	Born High Wycombe
1962-66	High Wycombe School of Art
1966-69	Camberwell School of Art
1968	Rotary Travelling Prize to Florence and Rome
1968	Lord Carron Prize
1969	Six Young Artists - Greenwich Theatre Gallery 1969
1969-71	Slade School of Fine Art
1971-74	Visited Jack Tworkov in New York
1972	Boise Travelling Scholarship to USA and Mexico
1973	Starts practicing Tai Chi
1985	Visited Willem de Kooning in East Hampton, NY
1989	Founds Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy, Bethnal Green, London
1998-2003	Visiting Artist, Montmiral School of Painting, France
2005	Artist in Residence, Vindrac-Alayrac, France

Teaching and Lecturing

1971-96	Visiting Lecturer at Chelsea School of Art, Slade School of Fine Art, Bath Academy of Art, Newcastle University and Manchester School of Art
1971-88	Portsmouth Polytechnic
1972-93	Camberwell School of Art
1975-97	St. Martin's School of Art
1994-95	Slade School of Fine Art
1995-96	Tate Education: de Kooning, Cézanne, Pollock
1999	<i>Classic Cézanne</i> , Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia, Masterclass Drawing Week
2001	Cézanne Lecture at Newcastle University
2004	Drawing Marathon at New York Studio School
2004-08	Drawathon 12 at Vyner Street studio
2009	Drawathon 13 at Marles Stud Studio, Epping
2011-14	Drawathon 14, 15, 16. At Marles Stud Studio Epping.

Solo Exhibitions

1976 & 1979	Acme Gallery, London
1978	Newcastle Polytechnic Gallery

1979	Peterloo Gallery, Manchester
1982, 1984 & 1986	Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London
1983	Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry
1984	Castlefield Gallery, Manchester
1989	Jean Wainwright, Chiswick, London
	Studio Show, Hackney, London
1989-94	Studio Shows, Parsifal Road, West Hampstead, London
1990	Goldsmiths Gallery, London
1991	Gallery 10, Grosvenor Street, London
1996	<i>Works on Paper</i> , Gallery M, Flowers East, London
1997	Flowers East, London
1999	King St Gallery, Sydney
2000	<i>The Quiet Paintings</i> , Flowers East, London
2003	Flowers Central, London
	Studio Show, Vyner Street, London
2006	Burgh House, Hampstead, London
2008	Flowers East, London
	Mason's Yard Gallery, London
2010	<i>Early Works 1968-69</i> , Alan Wheatley Art, London
2012	<i>Spontaneity of Movements</i> , Alan Wheatley Art, London
2014	<i>Constant Within The Change</i> , Clifford Chance, London
	<i>Constant Within The Change</i> , Alan Wheatley Art, London

Group Exhibitions

1969	<i>Play Orbit</i> , ICA, London
1971	<i>Platform '71</i> , Museum of Modern Art, Oxford
	<i>Young Contemporaries</i> , Royal Academy of Arts, London
	<i>Recent Work by Younger British Painters from the Collection of W J Carey</i> , Eugene McDermott Gallery, Dallas, Texas
1972	<i>Drawing</i> , Museum of Modern Art, Oxford
1974	<i>British Painting 1974</i> , Hayward Gallery, London
1975 & 1976	Vera Russell's Artists' Market, Covent Garden, London
1977	<i>British Painting 1952-77</i> , Royal Academy of Arts, London
1978	<i>Some Recent Acquisitions from The Arts Council Collection</i> , Hayward Gallery, London
	<i>Notices by Dick Lee</i> , Camden Arts Centre, London

2003 *Small is Beautiful*, Flowers Central, London
New British Art 1, Flowers, New York

2004 *Wragg and McLean*, Vinopolis, London
Little Venice Artists, Little Venice Gallery, London
Small is Beautiful: Here and Now, Flowers Central, London
Studio Show, Vyner Street, London

2005 35th Anniversary Exhibition, Flowers East, London
Royal Academy Summer Prints Show, London
Arts Unwrapped 2005, Vyner Street Studio Show, London
East into West, Alma Enterprise, London
East into West, Wine Gallery, London
Small is Beautiful, Flowers Central, London

2006 *Circus*, Empire Gallery, London
Gallery Artists, Flowers East, London
Small is Beautiful, Flowers Central, London
Studio Show, Vyner St, London

2007 Chicago Art Fair, USA
25 Years of Post-War British Art 1951-1975, Paisnel Gallery, London
Scratching the Surface, Eton Gallery, Eton
Toronto Art Fair
Small is Beautiful, Flowers Gallery, New York

2008 *Four Abstract Artists*, Flowers Central, London
Paisnel Gallery, London
Meta, Ruskin Gallery, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge
Small is Beautiful, Flowers on Madison, New York

2009 Flowers Central, (Lower Gallery), London
Paisnel Gallery, London
Alan Wheatley Art, London
Flowers Central, (Upper Gallery), London
London Group, The Menier Gallery
Small is Beautiful, Flowers East, London

2010 London Group, The Cello Factory
40 Years Anniversary, Flowers East
New to Sight, Poussin Gallery, London
Scratching the Surface, BayArt Gallery, Cardiff
Alan Wheatley Art, London
Modern Masters, Alan Wheatley Art, London

2011 *The Art of Giving*, Saatchi Gallery, London
Alan Wheatley Art, London
Discerning Eye, Mall Galleries, London
Small is Beautiful, Flowers Gallery, London

2012 *100 Prints*, Flowers East, London
Alan Wheatley Art, London
Abstract Critical Newcomer Awards (selector), Kings Place, London
Art, Lloyds Club, London
Small is Beautiful, Flowers, London
New Possibilities: Abstract Paintings from the Seventies, The Piper Gallery, London
The London Suite II, Advanced Graphics, London

2013 Alan Wheatley Art, London Art Fair, Islington, London
Alan Wheatley Art, 20/21 International Art Fair, Royal College of Art, London
Small is Beautiful: Who is Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?, Flowers East, London
ISPDA Print Fair, Park Avenue Armory, New York
London Original Print Fair, Royal Academy, London

2014 *I Cheer A Dead Man's Sweetheart: 21 Painters in Britain*, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on 5
Art 14, Olympia, London
The Social Basis Of Abstract Art, Up Down Gallery, Ramsgate.
Small is Beautiful. Flowers Gallery, New York.

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John McLean, 'British Painting 1952-77', *The Guardian*
1978 Rippon, 'Notes on New Abstract Painting', *Artscribe*, no. 10, Jan
Terence Maloon 'London Group', *Time Out*, 7 April
Maloon, 'Gary Wragg at the Newcastle Polytechnic', *Artscribe*, no.11
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John McEwen, 'Rarities', *The Spectator*, 26 August
Art Monthly

1979 Robertson, 'Gary Wragg at Acme Gallery', *Harpers & Queen*, February
 John Spurling, 'Gary Wragg at Acme Gallery', *New Statesman*,
 9 February
 William Feaver, 'Gary Wragg at Acme Gallery', *Observer*,
 11 February
 James Faure-Walker, 'Fertile Forms', *Artscribe*, no. 16
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1980 Edward Lucie Smith, 'Hayward Annual', *The Evening Standard*
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1981 Mary-Rose Beaumont, 'Summer Exhibition: Nicola Jacobs Gallery', *Arts Review*, August

1982 Waldemar Januszczak, 'Gary Wragg', *The Guardian*, 19 May
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1983 Monica Petzel, 'Younger British Artists', *Time Out*, December
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1984 Sarah Kent, 'Gary Wragg, Nicola Jacobs Gallery', *Time Out*, February
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1987 *Artscribe*
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1988 *The Guardian*

1989 *Art Review*, March

1991 Matthew Collings, *City Limits*, December

1996 Andrew Graham-Dixon, *The Independent*, June,
High & Ham, June

1997 Tim Hilton, *The Guardian*

1999 Sebastian Smee, *The Sydney Herald*
 John McEwen, *The Sunday Telegraph*
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2000 Emma Biggs, *Modern Painters*
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2007 Nowyczas Wojciech A. Solczynski, *New Time*

2008 Nicholas Usherwood, *Galleries*

2014 Nicholas Usherwood, *Galleries*
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GARY WRAGG FINISSAGE at CLIFFORD CHANCE

CONCERT TO CLOSE THE EXHIBITION AND BOOK LAUNCH OF : CONSTANT WITHIN THE CHANGE: GARY WRAGG: FIVE DECADES OF PAINTINGS: A COMPREHENSIVE CATALOGUE.

Sunday afternoon, 3-5pm.

30th Floor Gallery, Clifford Chance, 10 Upper Bank Street, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5JJ.

RSVP essential: garywragg@btinternet.com garywraggstudio.co.uk

Early reply welcome.

Following a very successful reception and book launch evening on the 8th of April

There has been an enthusiastic response since with visitors to the exhibition. The concert also offers a last opportunity to view the paintings and or purchase the comprehensive catalogue for those people who were unable to attend the evening reception.

Programme for the 1st half - performed by Emma Wragg, violin, and James Cheung, Piano:

Ralph Vaughan-Williams The Lark Ascending

Ludwig van Beethoven The Spring Sonata, Opus 24 in F major

The first half should last approximately 45 minutes so the interval should be at 3.45.

Programme for 4th May, Clifford & Chance.

(2nd half:) Ben Wragg – Solo Violin

Bach – Andante from Sonata no.2 in A minor for Solo Violin.

Telemann – Fantasy no.2 in G for Violin without Bass.

S. Prokofiev – Sonata for Solo Violin.



Solo & Group Exhibitions 2014

Solo Exhibitions

Constant Within the Change, Clifford Chance, London, 10/3/2014- 4/5/2014

Constant Within the Change, Alan Wheatley Art, London, 18/11/2014 – 5/12/2014

Group Exhibitions

I Cheer A Dead Mans Sweetheart, De La Warr Pavillion, Bexhill. 15/3/2014—29/6/2014

The Social Basis of Abstract Art, UpDown Gallery, Ramsgate 4/10/2014 – 15/11/2014

Small is Beautiful, Flowers Gallery, New York. 20/11/2014 - 10/01/2014

Whitechapel Art Book Fair, London 26/9/2014-28/9/2014

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