

## Charlie Prodger: Cardinal Beams

Hollybush Gardens, London  
20 September to 26 October

On the far wall of Hollybush Gardens is *Jasmine Untethered*, 2024, in which an unusual object floats through a deep swathe of blue. Around this are bunches of soft, dreamy clouds that blur at their edges. From a distance, the materiality of the paper is clear, with its raised, rough and grainy texture allowing each micro-fold in the paper to form a tiny sand dune. The whole is a textural desert, drenched in blue. The jagged edges of the paper add to this quality, as if neatly torn from a sketchbook.

This refusal by artist Charlie Prodger to neaten the medium is unsurprising. Discussing her early work as a Goldsmiths' student, Prodger explains that 'my interest in working with film was not for its romantic associations, but for its hard-edged material parameters ... 16mm film comes in fixed lengths, and I thought of those lengths as a way to measure time and space'. Prodger is an artist who not only works with the materiality of the medium but also makes its perimeters part of the work. 'Cardinal Beams', then, marks a shift in Prodger's practice, away from the moving-image installations for which she is best known and towards drawings rendered in coloured pencil. The assembled group of eight images over the gallery's two spaces seems aimed, in part, at slowing down the immediacy of digital capture of Prodger's previous works in order to make something softer and slower.

The mystery object in *Jasmine Untethered* is a floating tool bag. The work is a reference to a photograph taken by astronaut Satoshi Furukawa of a tool bag which had accidentally been let go in space, where it continued to orbit the Earth for months at an altitude slightly beyond the naked eye. Prodger's drawing of the tool bag, framed against a deep-blue limit, finally returns it to the human realm.

This experimentation with perspective and light filters through the other drawings in the exhibition. *Arlington, August I* and *Arlington, August II* reference Arlington Baths Club, a historic Victorian bathhouse and swimming pool in Glasgow, of which Prodger is a member. The two works appear like compilations, holding together two or three smaller drawings. It is as though one is looking at a storyboard, or perhaps at stills from a multi-channel film installation. Are we seeing two or three narratives unfolding alongside each other simultaneously, or at different times, or are these broken and reordered scenes from a single narrative? *Arlington I* features an act of masturbation, with two legs spread apart and hands roaming in between, the figure lying perhaps across a bench or atop a towel. Beneath this self-enclosing or invitational act is an ornate stained-glass window. Prodger captures the light seeping through these limey green and paler purple glass inlays, a golden wreath entangled in these jewelled tones. The ornate pattern obfuscates what lies behind, what is hidden away upstairs in the privacy of the changing room.

*Arlington II* features another intimate act of autoeroticism above seemingly quaint shots of the Arlington Baths. Where *Arlington I* featured stained glass, *Arlington II* pictures a sterile white door with a Georgian wired-glass panel commonly found in



Charlie Prodger, *Arlington, August II*, 2024

schools and hospitals. The ambient light from the swimming pool backlights the mottled glass, producing a different view of what lies behind: an image made of only movement and shadows. Like the stained glass, our perspective is one of an outsider attempting to look through and beyond these screens in order to try to construe these private acts of pleasure and self-exploration.

The role of glass and light takes a different form in *Volcano Snake Sun*. This large drawing features a shelf with a curious selection of postcards that depict coiled snakes and mountain ranges. Rocks and stone have featured heavily in Prodger's film works in relation to themes of how time is embedded in identity. Across the whole drawing are grey grid-like shadows, perhaps formed by the window pane as light pours in from behind. The use of grids is another recurring theme across Prodger's practice, and we see it used to shape the backgrounds of several works, including the drawings of 6th-century BC Assyrian stone relief panels. 'Grids are used to map and to contain,' says Prodger, 'but in the end they are always infinite; what we can't see extends beyond the edges of the frame.'

Each drawing in 'Cardinal Beams' feels like a diary entry - an exploration of perspective through the artist's eyes as she imagines its limits. Prodger directs our attention to stained glass, to the tiles beneath her feet or to the postcards in her studio. Each drawing is a way to contemplate how light shines on the worlds around us, both deep in time and right at our footsteps.

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