

Sam Jackson  
Chronicles

No. 1



Sam Jackson  
Chronicles

Private View  
Thursday 30 May 2019

Exhibition  
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CHARLIE SMITH LONDON

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'If what was once real is now  
imagined, how do I remember an  
autobiography of stories unresolved?'  
Sam Jackson, 2019



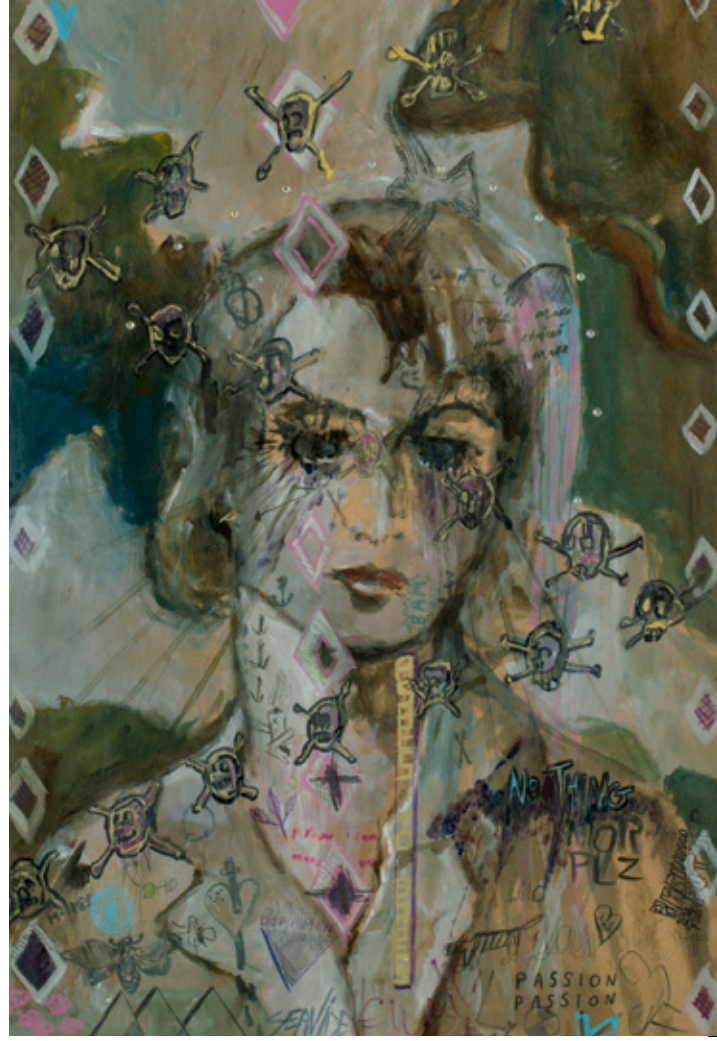
SAM



*Chronicles*, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, spray paint on board 162x114cm



/ Know / Can Make It, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, spray paint, diamanté on board 64x44cm





You Can't Wrap Your Arms Around A Memory, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, diamanté on board 64x44cm



I'm Ready To Lose It All, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, spray paint, diamanté on board 32x22cm



# THE DENSITY OF LIFE

by Graham Crowley

In the work of Sam Jackson things aren't what they seem. His paintings may look as if they're portraits; nothing could be further from the truth. They're paintings that invoke portraiture combined with a hint of the readymade. These are paintings that start life as depictions of portraits – or memories of portraits. Rather like the work of Gerhard Richter, in which he (Richter) paints the photograph as an object, rather than what is depicted in the photograph – a form of 'second order' representation. It's painting which refers us to a condition rather than a subject – a remembrance of paintings past. Painting as discourse.

At the core of these pictures are a set of ciphers or talismans which take the form of predominantly youthful white women who seem to have appeared from either some mediumistic ether, or torn from an ancient copy of Screenplay or perhaps the sleeve of a charity shop LP – the sort that have the legend 'Stereo' emblazoned across one corner.

'Are you talking to me...?' Travis Bickle

They appear as if they're a roll call of unidentified victims or long-forgotten celebrities or minor starlets – it's never specified. All now dust – celebrity dust. If that is not enough, Sam Jackson's paintings bear scars and scuffs, looking as if they had been mislaid or passed down. This is conferred by their mildly distressed and desiccated surface – images that seem as if they were once lost or abandoned and have recently

been rediscovered – paintings in which two or more individuals seem to have had a hand, sometimes years, even generations apart, each unaware of the others existence, or intentions. Some paint, others pen epigrams and several others half remembered lyrics and fragments of texts.

All of which creates the 'noise' of partial, fleeting and fugitive thoughts – intangible, broken and bruised. It's a cliché to suggest that disassociation and discontinuity are symptomatic of modernity but few painters manage to reflect this more convincingly – or more authentically – an incongruous term, for what is fundamentally a fully synthesised form of appropriationist painting.

Sam Jackson's paintings have the appearance of apparition. They look as if they were portraits of the 'departed' as if summoned by a medium. The theatrical or performative analogy can be extended to a kind of ventriloquy in which the painter voices the cipher or image.

A critical element of Sam Jackson's paintings is the distinction between wakefulness and sleep. Key to these pictures is what Celia Green and Robert Waggoner (amongst others) have termed lucid dreams – a state in which the dreamer is aware that they're dreaming and is able to influence the dream.

The surface of the painting exemplifies this as it's a mix of fleeting thoughts and hypnagogic imagery – the internal chatter



All Apologies, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 32x22cm



and broken ramblings that characterise the drift into sleep. Near waking images of a lost love or some unspecified longing – smeared with unfiltered phrases and irrepressible thoughts. Along with the misremembered lyrics of a song that may or may not have ever existed. Melancholic reflections of false hope and faded celebrity – the ashes of so many aspirations.

'Today I wrote nothing.' Daniil Kharms

The surfaces, as there are two distinct surfaces, are both (in their own terms) utterly coherent. The first are the likenesses that are a consistent appropriation of some rather nostalgic form of portraiture, redolent of upper class Edwardian drawing rooms, which have been wilfully misappropriated in such a manner that makes them seem 'wrong' – but simultaneously fascinating.

There's also a sense of fetish reminiscent of Dogon sculpture of Mali. Dogon sculpture is characterised by gaunt wooden carvings with masses of six-inch nails rammed into the head. Sam Jackson's paintings also reference ritual West African scarification.

Another and more parochial memory that is aroused is the inside back page or cover of a school exercise book which would be embellished with the name of some crush, written and ornamented repeatedly to the point of illegibility. Stylised hearts and flowers drawn as if in a reverie. Even the ground colour of Sam Jackson's paintings evokes those sugar paper greens, blues and browns of exercise books.

There are worried fragments of graffiti swarming over the surface like flies on a piece of week-old meat – or worse – soiled souvenirs that harbour decaying memories. Images distilled from a distant and sometimes indistinct sense of collective memory. There's a lot of talk about memory and the retrieval of memories – it kept Proust busy for almost 20 years.

There's also Simon Schama's excellent 'Landscape and Memory' that addresses this from an historical perspective. Much closer to the paintings of Sam Jackson is the work of the multifarious W. G. (Max) Sebald, who invests his writing with a rich mix of self and otherness, fiction and non-fiction, engendered to some extent, by his use of what appear to be found and out of focus black and white photographs. The boundaries are many and soft.

'Never leave the day room, never leave the day room...'  
Grandpa Simpson

A sense of decay and subtle decadence permeates the imagery. Stéphane Mallarmé still casts a shadow. The broken texts skip and slide across the surface of the paintings like so many haptic outpourings and random anxieties, that decoded read as: What happens after death? Where's the next meal coming from? Is this it? Why me? What's all this then?

Whenever I reflect on Sam Jackson's work there's something tantalisingly insoluble – strange to say – but I'm never quite



You Knew It In Your Lifetime, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 64x44cm





sure if I've dreamt them. An infectious form of collective amnesia perhaps?

Ultimately these paintings are lamentations for the passing of youth, the ineluctable passage of time and the attendant weight of that anxiety. A way, perhaps, of assuaging the creeping and unpleasant suspicion that our best years may be behind us? The familiar constantly rendered unfamiliar by the sheer density of life.



Never Lie To Yourself, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, spray paint on board 64x44cm



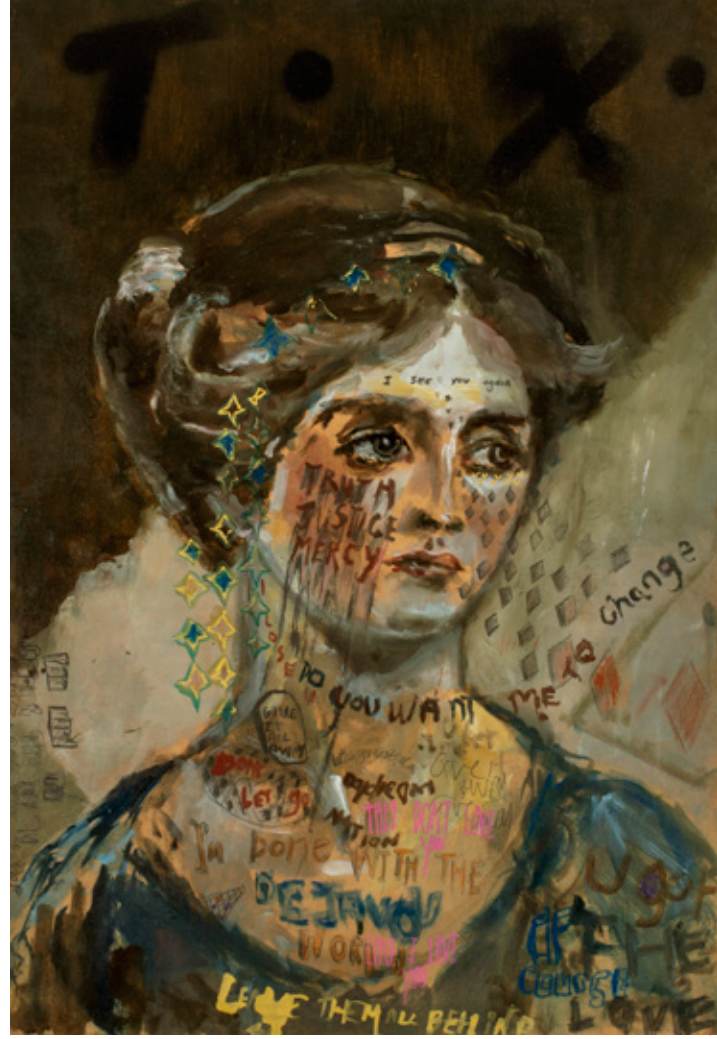
Simply Ours, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 32x22cm



Days Pass, 2019 Oil, pencil on board 32x22cm



Leave Them All Behind, 2019 Oil, marker, spray paint on board 64x44cm





How Long Have You Known, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 32x22cm



I Hope You See What I See, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 32x22cm





Dear Sam,

Here's what I see in your painting: I see souls and hear voices. Text pushed upon the subjects and pulled from them, sometimes thoughts withheld and bursting to get out, longing to reveal themselves. Anger, joy, regret, past love, and future dreams—the scribble of our interiors mixed with the shower of messages from the outside world, pounding on us like some relentless rain.

My favorite Jackson paintings are extreme in their technique. Those formed with layers and layers of thin paint and varnish, each coat of the brush distorting the previous one like memory itself, a kind of encoded archeology. Or those works that use paint so sparingly it was like you knew the supply was running out and had to finish with what was left—squeezing it out of the tube, squeezing the work from yourself, until there was nothing more to get or give.

I am writing this from memory, an exercise to capture how the work makes me feel, rather than diving into tighter visual descriptions. In my mind, the depicted characters—a cast that always reads as non-specifically historic—look away eternally, stilled and stolid, imagining what they cannot have, searching. It is a quiet gesture that belies rage, sex, violence—everything that must be contained and put away. Even though that's never really possible.

A beautiful defiance haunts your pictures and their modern graffiti. A transgression of identity: tender, beautiful men and raw, ambitious women. Submerged in some impossible void. Trapped, but knowing. Willing to live the lives they crave—if only in their imagination.

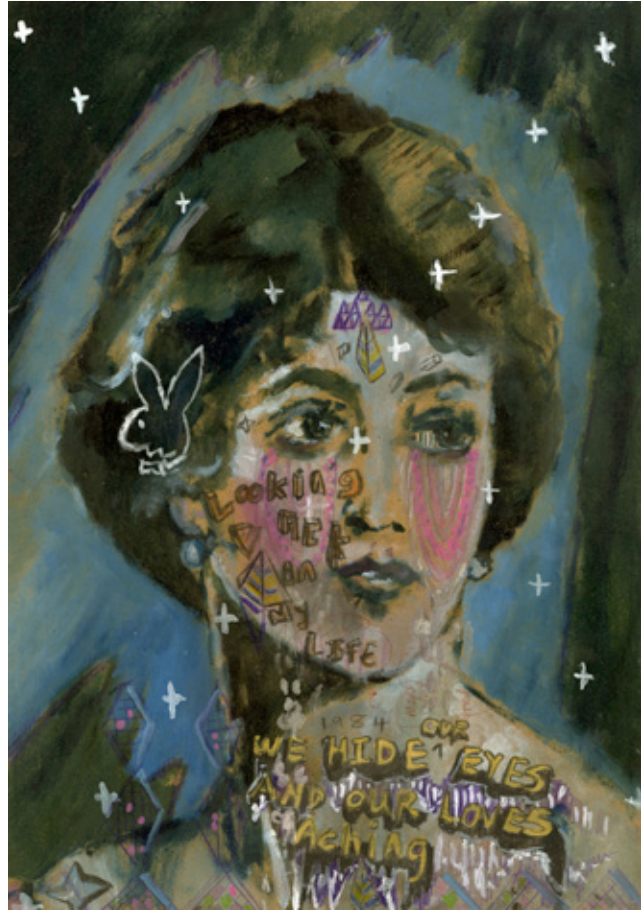
Sam, the world sits fragile, brutal, and magnificent in your hands,

Christine Coulson



You Can't Unsee The Truth, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 64x44cm

All My Past Will This Day Be A Part Of Me, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, diamanté on board 32x22cm



With Its Broken Dreams It's Still A Beautiful World, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 32x22cm





Purple Rain, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, diamanté on board 32x22cm



Almost Blue, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, spray paint, diamanté on board 32x22cm



# MAKE UP

by Sacha Craddock

Quite roughly painted, apparently not following all the rules, this series of paintings has as much to do with Ingres as a 1940's film poster or anything else in between and after. The layers of interference that lie across the surface of these invented portraits invest graphic shallowness with a pleasurable yet contradictory promise. An almost adolescent patterning has taken hold, it seems. The spray paint in *Almost Blue*, for instance, really gets in the way. It is as if Jackson has fought against an assured language to waylay, hold up, and interrupt. The result is a physical manifestation of converging, conflicting, long-established habits.

The blue-eyed woman in *All Apologies* looks out as if from another era, she is constructed as a subject and made up in every way. 'What else should I be,' she asks and 'Promise you have been true' in scrawled lettering. Crosses carrying as much finesse as a self-administered prison cell tattoo appear as if engraved upon the surface; waves of artistic history and visual association condition painter and spectator alike.

Jackson seems inevitably part of a discussion about the way any painting process carries the past along with it. He throws different speeds, shapes, processes and spanners into the works, in order to counter inevitable ideas of perfection, to create cultural congestion. Affected, it appears, by the perpetual endism that surrounds the medium, he uses a range of media, till the biro is perhaps not the biro. The perfect, yet fairly musty, *To Me Your Like The Setting Sun, You Burn And*

*Your Gone*, made with oil and marker on board, has 'There is a Light That Never Goes Out' written in biro, no, paint, across a heightened and somewhat chalky forehead.

'Now is the end, the end of the world', Peter Cook and Dudley Moore chanted at the top of the hill, a long time ago, but then 'oh well, same time next week'; because nothing has happened. If you are layering ideas, how clear need the image be, in simple terms. How can everything become tighter? Can the extreme layering of existence be represented by figurative terms alone? Can past, present, memory and myth effectively pile on top of each other and make sense?

From the eyes, to the limp grey paint, *And It Never Is* shows an attempt to make sense, to re-affirm self in order as to find out why this person is being made to exist in the first place. 'A secret life' is written across the brow - full lips again, a face somewhat Princess Diana, this time, definitely out of another time. So, this series of mock portraits by Jackson is not suggestive of obvious ideas of sex and gender so much as the smell of a fictional or real mummy coming down the stairs, dressed and ready to go out, perhaps forever. Memory, film, and stories build-up, like silt, but we fear losing what we thought we knew. Always anyway questioning the role of painting; who makes it, who it is for; and what an image is capable of representing today.





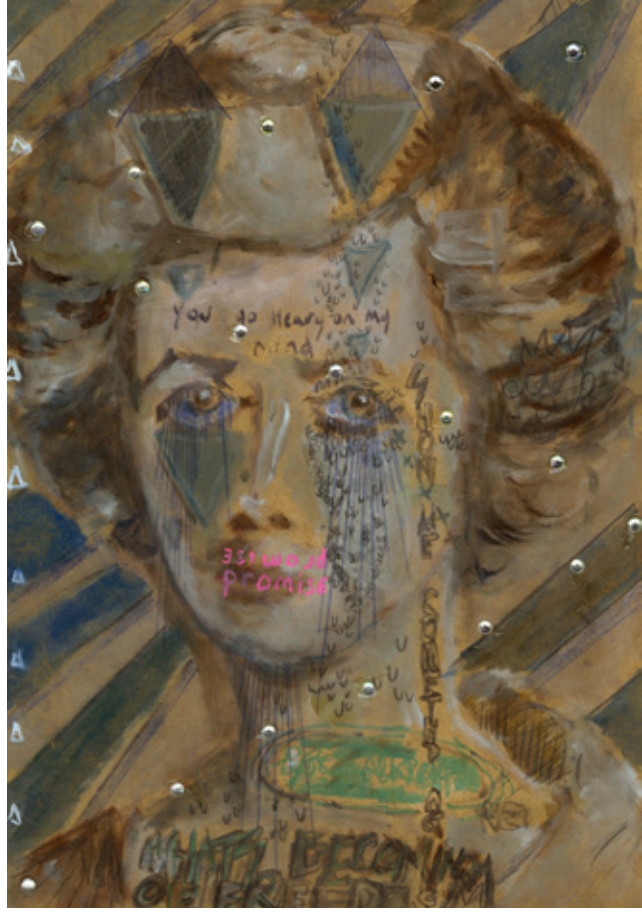
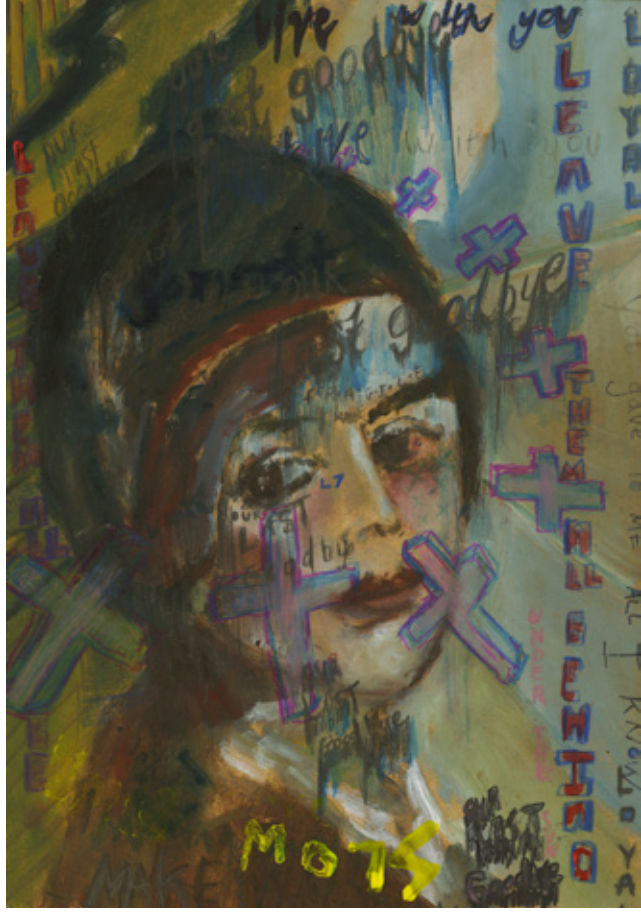
The fears and strengths of each woman is given. Paint and drawing on the back of the exercise book becomes one and the same thing: 'stay', written in spray paint brings a level of questioning and insecurity to the surface and yet all still swerves towards perfection. Eyelashes batter, the ground is radiating, the space is Cubistic perhaps, and yet the line of badly drawn hearts still and inevitably plays at description with great facility.

I'm Worse At What I Do Best And For That I Feel Blessed, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, spray paint on board 64x44cm





Our Last Goodbye, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil on board 32x22cm



Fade Into You, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, diamanté on board 32x22cm

I've Got A Question Everytime I Hold You, 2019 Oil, marker, pencil, spray paint, diamanté on board 64x44cm



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