



Hannah Payne Jun 1, 2020

## THE ART FIVE, Issue 4, with Artist, Alice Wilson

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The tree house has been a theme of your recent work, can you tell us about this?

**AW:** Yes, the tree houses are quite recent really but the imagery and the context has been in my practice for a long time. The odd house is cut from a magazine, (when I see one I like), but the majority are from my photographs of houses. I have quite a library of images that I refer to and am

very familiar with.

There's definitely something of 'home' in there, and maybe with the tree element there's a suggestion that home can be hard to reach or identify. I think there is also something heavily romantic and surreal in these works. My familiarity with the images I've used is quite loaded for me, they are images I have been working with for years. In the instance of the tree element, I can readily identify the whole photograph that it has come from. I often wonder about this in my sculptural work too, my familiarity with each piece of wood can be quite extensive, knowing when and where each mark has happened, if I ever add a mark to a piece of wood once I've started working with it in a sculpture it immediately becomes contrived for me, but the viewer would never know, the fact I know matters to me. Similarly with the tree house works, they are composed on old drawing boards that I have used during teaching; so within the work there is also an addition of other peoples marks that I could never imagine tampering with.



It's on reflection of this recent work that I realised I have already made a tree house in my work 'DALLAS' but hadn't fully connected this to my recent work, it's nice when you make connections further down the line. I like being led by the making, something I've learnt to relax into more, I think some artists (myself included) can get stuck on trying to almost illustrate an idea, it's better when the ideas and the making have more autonomy.

That said one of my greatest influences, Magritte, was particularly good at making images that communicate ideas with incredible eloquence.



'The Human Condition' (La condition humaine), 1933, René Magritte, Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. © National Gallery of Art in Washington DC.



Your tree houses seem to fall somewhere between the real and the imagined. Is that something you are conscious of?

**AW:** I think there's an element of play, I'm quite good at making things but most of these you would find pretty hard to realise... that said, I have plans!

I've been referring to these works as collage, but I think a more concise description would be photo montage. I like this method of making as it is so clearly a construct, the viewer is aware they're being played with, but it can be very divisive; you put a picture of David Cameron next to picture

of a pig, even in the most obviously false scenario, scale-wise or with backdrops etc. Your viewer's mind goes on a journey.



Kleine Sonne (Little Sun), 1969, Hannah Höch, Collage, 41.4 x 61.5 cm  
© Whitechapel Gallery

I was reminded of Hannah Höch's work when I was making these, the confidence to leave space and to juxtapose maybe only two elements comes from the use of photography. The photographic element puts the viewer at ease, maybe, and then at the same moment the juxtaposition throws them off course, leaving that space for the real and the imagined to co-exist as you describe.

The houses I have used in the tree house works are very familiar to me, so they do

represent an element of reality, maybe they are where I escape to in my mind. In addition, a lot of the titles for my work comes from house and place names, some left as they are, and others manipulated a little. For example: I used *FANK* as a title for a work, it had come from a house name I'd seen walking. My first response was to think it was 'thank' written phonetically for a south London accent. This made me think of the use of phonetics in Irvine Welsh's writing, which then took me to *Lanark* a novel by Alasdair Grey where 'Unthank' acts as a kind of avatar city to Glasgow, going between the real and the fictionalised... so I got to two works called *FANK* and *UNFANK* from what was a house name referring to Scottish dialect for a sheep pen. Possibly a good illustration of how reality can lead you to wherever you want, really.

For the viewer, I hope that the space they offer is very open.





'Snow House', 2020, Collage on Old Drawing Board, 29.7 x 21 cm

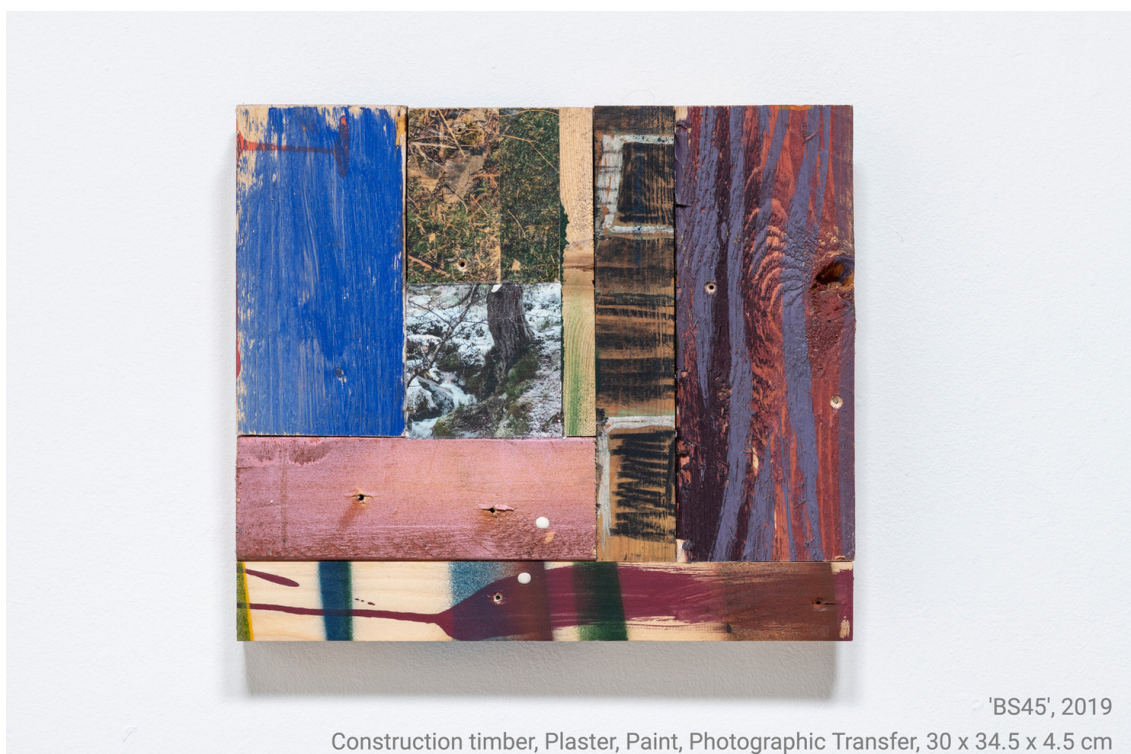


How have you been finding working in lockdown - Have you discovered any positives or things that have helped you as an artist, specifically?

**AW:** I have been really enjoying it and feeling incredibly lucky to have so much I need and want to do. Society feels quite divided between those who have found themselves having twice as much to do and those who have been given the gift of time, I feel a little guilty about being part of the latter - but I am certainly putting the time to good use. I can get quite panicked about the idea that I don't have enough time in my life to make everything I need to, so I'm really embracing it. It's been a massive refocus for me and I don't plan to go back to life as it was before. I've also been



fortunate enough to receive arts council funding to help through this time, it is quite scary what the future holds economically, but I'm feeling very positive. Being self employed like so many artists, it is enormously encouraging to receive this support.





Have you found your creative process has developed in new ways or ideas?

**AW:** In some very practical ways, yes. I have been more methodical in my making, taking the time to create work spaces for what I need to do in my studio, for example changing heights of work areas to suit the job (my back has been happy about this). I'm also getting better at waiting for paint to dry! I can be very impatient, I don't really take breaks when I'm working so getting more time has really altered that.



'Swamp', 2019, Aluminium Sheet, spray paint. 37 x 44 x 45 cm

It's also been a trigger for myself and Tash Kahn to continue our visual conversation '[Talking Heads](#)', a project we started last year which is a conversation in sculpture, simply visually responding to one another, a kind of opportunity to be autonomous in the process of looking and making. When



we were asked to stay at home for the foreseeable, Tash and I spoke about starting a conversation in 2D in addition to the 3D project.



Untitled, 2020. Spray paint, coloured pencil, photographic transfer,  
photocopy on plywood. 29.7 x 21 cm

It's been really great, and, like with the sculpture, the 2D has opened up space to make and do things that wouldn't normally come in to my everyday practice, for example I responded to Tash's drawing which alluded to several vanishing points by setting myself the task of accurately drawing two brick arches (inspired by Per Kirkeby) that adhere correctly to a singular vanishing point. I've spotted a few errors since finishing but almost every brick is correct, this is something I couldn't have fathomed taking the time to do previously.

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Your work has a strong connection to nature, both in subject and materiality, which as a London-based artist in the current situation must feel challenging.

After lockdown, do you have a place or escape in mind that might inspire future site-specific work?

**AW:** YES! If it is safe to do so I will travel to Scotland at the start of July and work there for almost two months. Working on site at two locations, I hope to secure the use of some timbers from one of the houses pictured in this series and start to plan how to realise a full-scale tree house work!



'Caravan', 2020, Collage on old drawing board, 29.7 x 21 cm

Current and future projects and exhibitions:

- 'The Collector's Room' curated by Karen David until 13th June, 2020, at [JGM Gallery, London](#).
- Talking Heads 3D and Talking Heads 2D are presented as ongoing conversations on instagram [@talking\\_heads\\_3d](#) and [@talking\\_heads\\_2d](#)
- [Hogchester Arts Residency](#), November 2020
- The Contact Layer: Painting At The End Of The World curated by Ian Gonczarow, Pictura Festival, Montreal, December 2020.

**Thank you to Alice Wilson for participating in The Art Five, Issue 4.**

Alice Wilson (b.1982, UK) is a London-based artist. Wilson works with construction timber, plaster, photography and paint, as well as often improvising with materials to realise ideas. Alice Wilson received an MA from Wimbledon School of Art, UAL in 2011 and a BA in Fine Art Painting from Loughborough University School of Art and Design in 2005.

For more information visit [www.alicewilson.org](http://www.alicewilson.org)

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