



Daisy Parris

Star-Studded Canopy
11 June – 11 July 2020
Sim Smith

Pain does not frighten me as long as it is an enrichment but I am so afraid to use my strength for nothing...

— Louis Bourgeois, diary entry, 1938.

Generosity is one means by which we orient and navigate within our relationships and life. Present thinking points to the idea that generosity in humans may be an innate behaviour, and as children we begin to develop empathy as early as two years old, at which time we begin to understand that we are distinctive beings from those around us and are able to recognize and name feelings. We begin to gradually regulate our emotional responses, understand that others may feel things differently to us, and imagine ways to respond to another person's distress. We may go out of our way to make others feel special, to freely "give good." An essential component of the trait or an act of generosity is the ability to understand others and what they need or feel. We call this empathy.

For Daisy Parris, the act of painting is a mode of language and feeling. This action, the intellectual and physical exchange that the artist has with the work, is by extension an exchange had with us, as viewers. Parris consciously responds to what she describes as the generosity of other artists, paired with a deep connection to people and events around her, especially in difficult times or challenging circumstances. These paintings encourage us to feel as deeply and fervently as Parris does when she is making them. When standing front of them, one can feel the expression of memory, connection, and love through an indelibly empathetic, conscious practice. The body of work comprising this exhibition communicates in a distinct language, offering a series of confessions perhaps, or maybe more of an opening-up of experience and personal history. We are invited to participate, to enter an experience, questioning the nature of how we communicate our dreams, fears, and hopes. We are challenged to empathise not just with the work or with the artist or with others around us, but with ourselves, to accept however it makes us feel, whether calm or disconcerted, anxious or excited, nostalgic or hopeful. We assent to honesty, and unexpected connections occur.

A profound continuation of a timeless conversation begins the moment an artist takes a brush to a canvas, begins to mould a lump of clay or composes sounds in an order. In painting, the nature of giving and receiving is intrinsic, as it is to art in general, defined by interactions between the artist and their medium, then the painting and the viewer, and back around again. The paintings themselves are sentences; line, form, texture, and colour are the words. By the time we see a painting on the wall, an entire vocabulary has been employed. Parris soaks up life in a particularly sensitive and thoughtful way, and describes her experiences of uncertainty and hopefulness to us in a visceral and honest way. If paintings could speak, these do not mince words. Some small paintings or works on paper indeed carry language embedded in them, such as Self Portrait with Nothing Ahead of Me, which was created at a moment of uncertainty about where her paintings would show next. These small works are like notes in the margins, context for the wider narrative.

In the larger works, we witness a kind of battle taking place. An uncertain, uncontained energy permeates every brushstroke, every point where two colours meet. If we "read" these paintings, such as enormous works *At Night*, *It's Worse*, or *My Mind Hurts*, a frame of time emerges. We know the night will give way to day, and the chaos of dark or scary thoughts will eventually settle. We feel a struggle, are aware that it can be a cycle, and yet we find brightness, hope, even exhilaration in the potency of colour and vibrancy of gesture. The paintings reach out and ask, "Are you feeling this too?"

— **Kate Mothes, April 2020**

Kate Mothes is a curator and writer based in Wisconsin. She is co-founder and editor of *Dovetail Magazine*.