



Robert Davison

Borders

A Selection of Paintings and Drawings 2016



Borders Cardoon *Acrylic and pigments on paper '07- 8 24" x 33"*
Previous page **Borders Crocosmia** *Acrylic on paper '07- 8 24" x 33"*

Introduction

Like Emile Nolde and his 'Forbidden Watercolours', Bob Davison often starts with a flower head. But unlike Nolde whose colours saturate us as we stare into the interior of a flower, Davison's luminous paintings extend spatially outward into the border, and on further still to the wider landscape 'field'.

As well as close scrutiny of plants in studio and garden, he typically gathers sensations whilst out on a walk or out bird watching. In other words - and following the Picasso maxim - Davison doesn't so much **seek** these encounters, as **find** them on the way to doing something else.

*Distracted from distraction, by distraction*¹.

Davison loves paint and understands how it behaves. He improvises by using makeshift stencils, or casting dry pigment into areas of wet paint. Going into his studio you enter a room that celebrates the particular form of intelligence that painting represents - a multitude of tactile and visual judgments deployed to articulate sensation and idea.

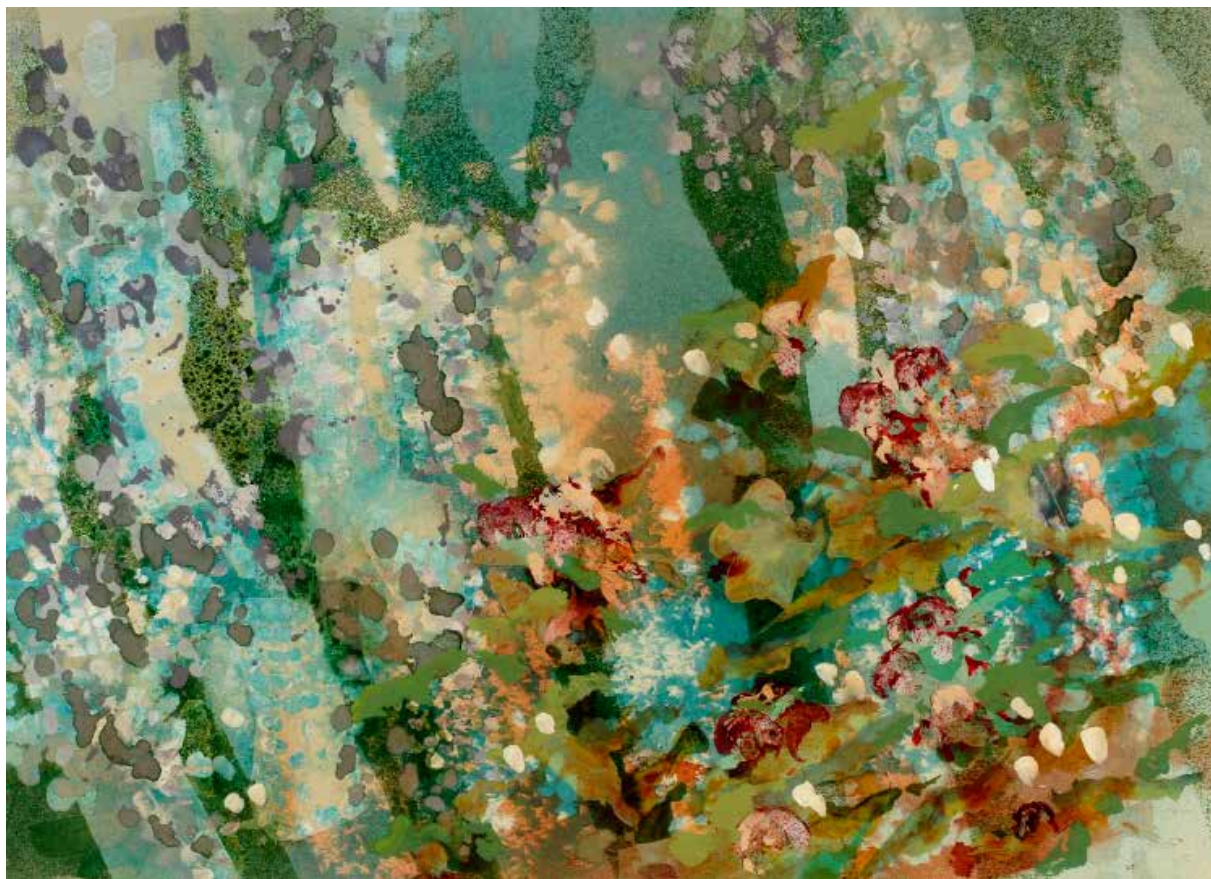
Stacked against the studio wall are numerous drawing boards used to stretch paper. On these he mixes paint and mediums with charcoal and pencil, making drawings that initiate ideas, help advance a partially developed painting, or sometimes merely an event in itself that may never go beyond that arena.

Over time Davison has developed a vocabulary of painterly signs that circulate around figuration and abstraction. A cascade of 'wobbly' circles is reminiscent of fractured light caught in a camera's lens. A cluster of long, dragged brush-strokes that individually might read as seed heads sets up a floating, jostling movement through repetition. Then there's the increasing transparency of paint which not only enables layers of under painting to be sensed, but also signs the shifting appearance of things.

This developing transparency is something that connects Davison to his native Norfolk and his passion for the watercolours of Cotman and contemporaries. Like so many artists, his current preoccupations can be traced to formative passions.

Stewart Geddes MPhil RCA, RWA (Trustee)

¹ T. S. Eliot (1936) *Burnt Norton: Collected Poems 1909 - 1935* London, Faber and Faber



Borders Leycesteria *Acrylic on Paper '07-8 24" x 33"*

About Looking

Borders: outlines and edges, but, also, national boundaries, flower beds and frames. Borders define areas but also propose the ambiguity of a place of transition: where precisely are you as you cross the border from one state to another? Where precisely does the town end and the country begin?

The notion of a borderland is apt for Bob Davison's art which occupies the liminal state between figuration and abstraction, mirroring perceptual processes which integrate objective observation with the subjectivity and ambiguity of memories and feelings.

The mystery and magic of seeing is that, unlike a camera's mechanical recording of data, our vision is constantly informed and coloured by experience both consciously and unconsciously: what lies beyond the border of consciousness shapes what lies within; what lies outside our immediate frame of vision informs what we see inside.

Davison's subtle and beautiful meditations on nature and memory, on colour and form, are rich counterpoints to the mechanistic images which dominate our contemporary culture and ways of seeing. Pictures are everywhere. In 1964 Susan Sontag wrote *Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction*¹; half a century on, our visual culture is super-saturated with images. The camera has a lot to answer for.

The gifts of photography to knowledge – and to art – have been prodigious. But photography has spoiled us, too. We have been spoiled, not just by the superfluity of images - is there any thing, any place, that has not yet been photographed, that we cannot 'see' and know through this extraordinary medium? - but it has also spoiled us in the very act of perception.

Lee Friedlander, wanting a snapshot of his uncle with his new car noted that, *I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary's laundry and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on a fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and seventy-eight trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It's a generous medium, photography.*²

¹ Susan Sontag (2009) *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* London: Penguin, p13

² Galassi, Peter (2005) *Friedlander, NY: The Museum of Modern Art*, New York, p14

Generous to a fault. The camera's gaze reveals everything in fascinating, but superficial, detail. Human perception might seem a poor thing next to the revelatory detail furnished in a high definition, colour saturated, digital image, showing us all the visual information we would otherwise have overlooked - and, perhaps, it has made us lazy; in Sontag's view, *the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience*³. We see only the surface appearance; we need to look harder.

Which is where drawing and painting comes in. Bob Davison's pictures offer rich pleasures and demand prolonged looking: they embody the recognition that the fullest experience of the world is dependent not on mere knowledge and information (both in overwhelmingly plentiful supply in our digital world) but on looking, thinking, acting and feeling. (John Constable declared *painting is... feeling*⁴).

Visual perception is more than data collection: it is informed by movement and emotion, memories and imagination. The human eye is never still; it is constantly scanning and calculating, discriminating and selecting. We experience the world by moving through it. We see what is interesting and important to us – what is meaningful. These sights and the accompanying sensations and emotions are stored away as memories – imperfectly, perhaps – to inform subsequent perceptions.

Remembering a selection of Davison's paintings and drawings seen during a recent visit to his studio, I remember, in particular, a scattering of bright yellow flowers (Welsh poppies, perhaps?) a swathe of curious, white oblong forms rhythmically dispersed across the canvas (sometimes suggestive of blossom, sometimes of patterns of light), the elegant silhouettes of complex plant forms.

When I return to look again I find that (of course) my recollections are inadequate. The richness, complexity and subtle layering of Davison's work mean that – unlike 'reading' a photograph which can deliver a great deal of information very quickly (and need not detain the viewer for very long) – the paintings demand, and repay, prolonged scrutiny and even then do not exhaust their visual pleasures, for each further viewing will reveal fresh colours, forms and textures.

³ Susan Sontag, *ibid.*, p13

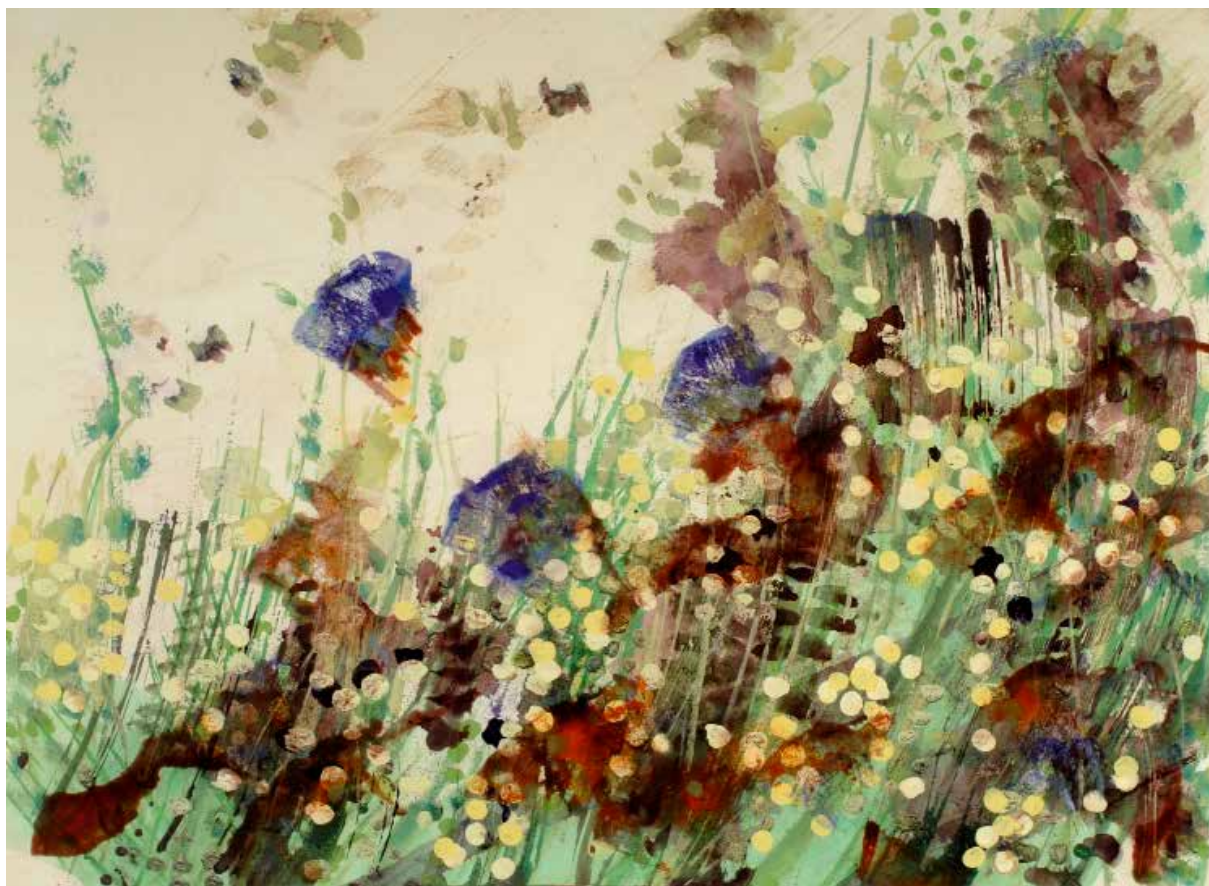
⁴ Stephen F. Eisenman (2011) *Nineteenth Century Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, p232

The achievement of these paintings is hard won: Davison's study of nature and art has been intense resulting in his mastery both of drawing from nature and of the language of painting. The story of modern painting has broadly been a dance (sometimes a battle) between figuration and abstraction – for a while total abstraction was the dominant mode (and Davison's early work shows his mastery of a minimalist style) but, today, a fruitful dialogue (cross-border discussion) is possible, and Davison's work is exemplary in this respect. As flowers dance in a breeze, so shapes and forms in the paintings dance between figure and abstraction: forms dissolve and reform in the ambiguous, translucent space of shadows and reflections. It is a mark of great painting that form and content are, as here, inseparable from each other.

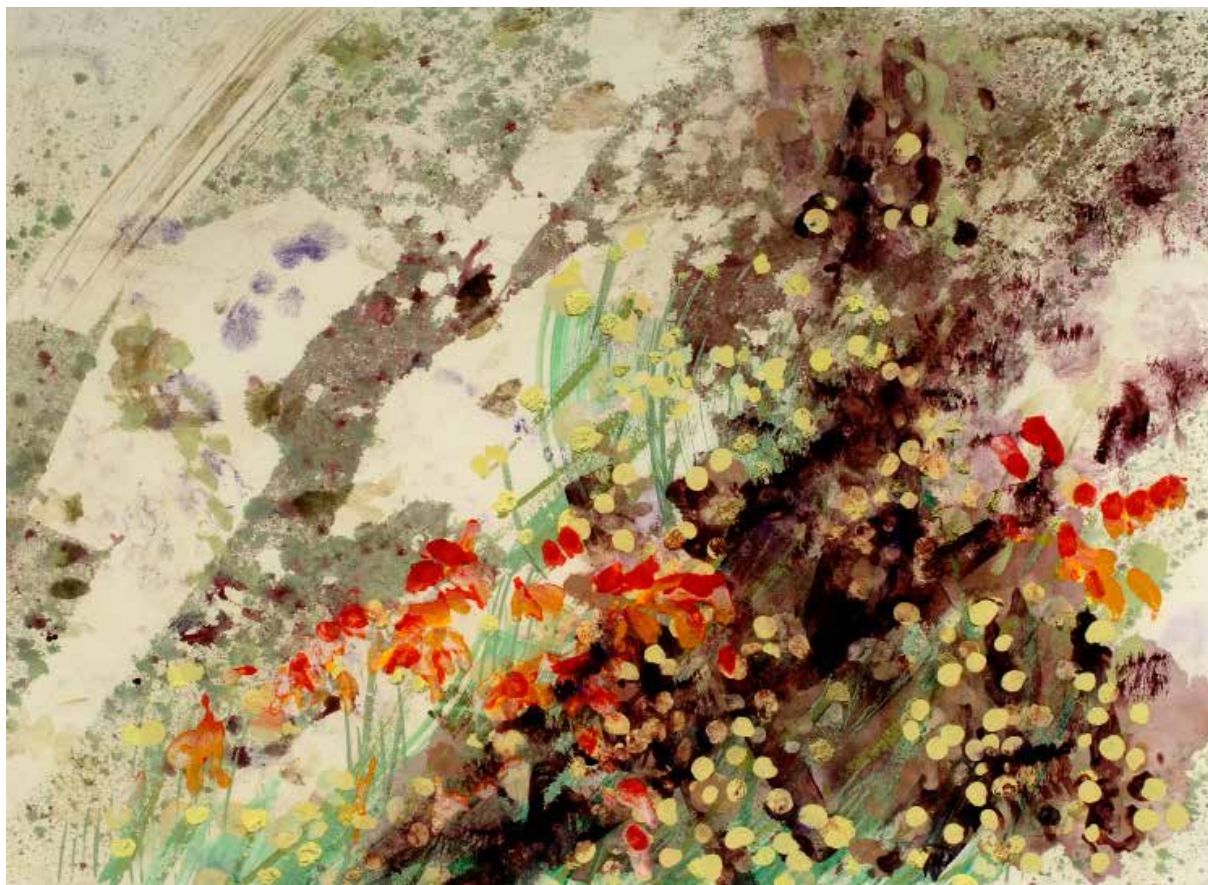
To return, finally, to Susan Sontag's reflections on modern visual culture: her prescription to counter what she sees as the dulling effect of our over exposure to images is simple: *What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more*⁵. The gift of Bob Davison's luminous paintings is precisely to reward the act of looking with an apprehension of the beauty and mystery of the world before us: to cross the border between appearance and sensation, between looking and feeling.

Richard Salkeld

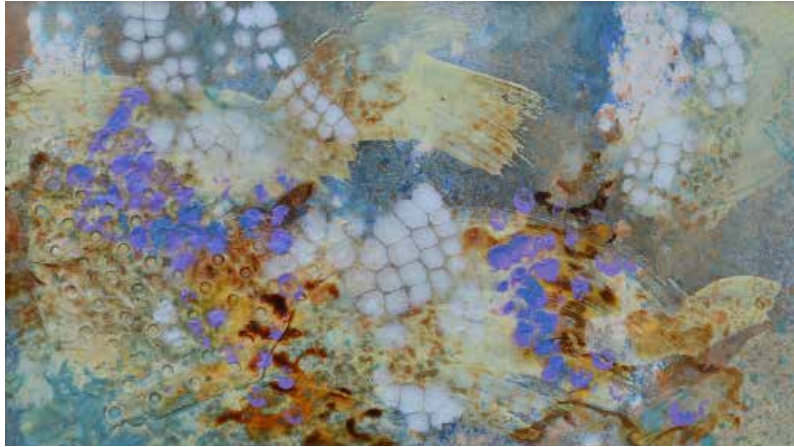
⁵ Susan Sontag, *ibid.*, p14



Borders Santolina *Acrylic on paper* '07- 8 24" x 33".

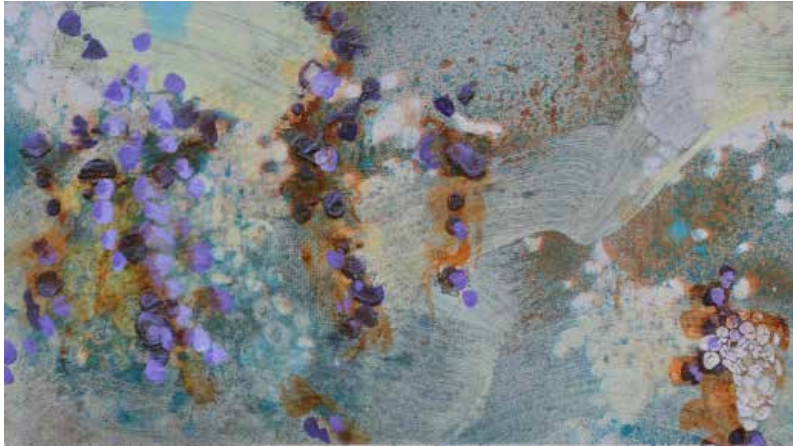


Borders II August *Acrylic on Paper '07 24" x 33"*



Wisteria Study June I *Acrylic and pigments on paper '05 10" x 18"*

Wisteria Study June IV *Acrylic and pigments on paper '05 10" x 18"*



Wisteria Study June III *Acrylic and pigments on paper* '05 10" x 18"

Wisteria Study June II *Acrylic and pigments on paper* '05 10" x 18"



Borders, May I *Graphite and acrylic on paper '05 10" x 18"*

Borders, May III *Graphite and acrylic on paper '05 10" x 18"*



Borders, May II *Graphite and acrylic on paper '05 10" x 18"*

Borders, May IV *Graphite and acrylic on paper '05 10" x 18"*



Borders Phlox/Crocosmia II *Acrylic on Paper '10 - 11 24" x 33".*



Borders Sedum/Phlox II *Acrylic and pigments on paper '10 - 11 24" x 33"*



Borders Sedum/Phlox I *Acrylic and pigments on paper '10 - 11 24" x 33"*



Wisteria Study I *Acrylic and pigments on paper '05 10" x 18"*

Wisteria Study II *Acrylic and pigments on paper '06 10" x 18"*



Sedum Frost I, II, III, IV *Acrylic and pigments on paper '12 - 13 8" x 12"*



Sedum Studies I, II, III, IV *Acrylic and pigments on paper '13 8" x 12"*



Borders II *Graphite and acrylic on paper* '14 22" x 33"



Border Sedum *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '11 44" x 60"*



Phlox Small Red Acrylic and pigments on paper '13 24' x 33"



Phlox Small Yellow *Acrylic and pigments on paper '13 24' x 33"*



Phlox Small Blue Acrylic and pigments on paper '13 24' x 33"



Phlox, Big Red *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '13 60" x 79"*



Umbellifers Study II *Acrylic and pigments on paper '06 8" x 10"*

Umbellifers Study I *Acrylic and pigments on paper '06 8" x 10"*



Umbellifers *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '14 54" x 79"*



Border Study Blue III *Acrylic and pigments on paper* '14 10" x 16"

Border Study Blue IV *Acrylic and pigments on paper* '14 10" x 16"



Petiolaris *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '13 54" x 79"*



Cambria Study I *Graphite and acrylic on paper '10 11" x 8"*

Dendrobium Study I *Graphite and acrylic on paper '10 11" x 8"*



Orchid, Cambria Study *Acrylic and pigments on paper '13 18" x 10"*
Orchid, Oncidium Study *Acrylic and pigments on paper '14 18" x 10"*



Borders Study Orange I *Acrylic and pigments on paper '12 - 13 8" x 12"*

Borders Study Orange II *Acrylic and pigments on paper '13 8" x 12"*



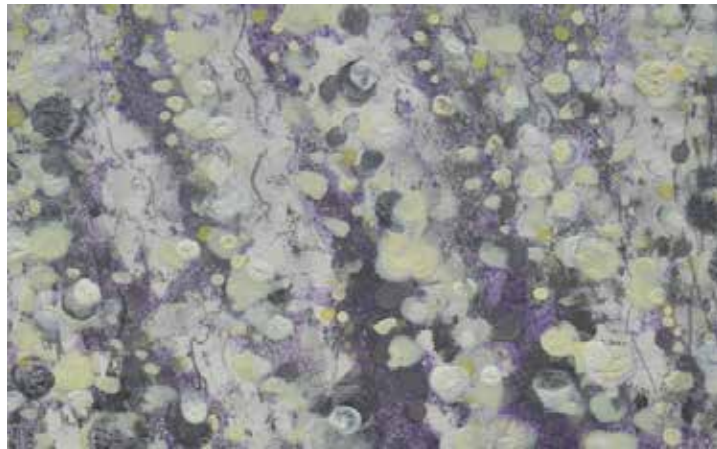
Borders Dappled *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '14 44" x 60"*



Borders I *Graphite and acrylic on paper* '14 22" x 33"



Borders Cardoons *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '15 44" x 60"*



Pieris Study I *Acrylic on paper '15 10" x 16"*

Pieris Study VI *Acrylic on paper '15 10" x 16"*



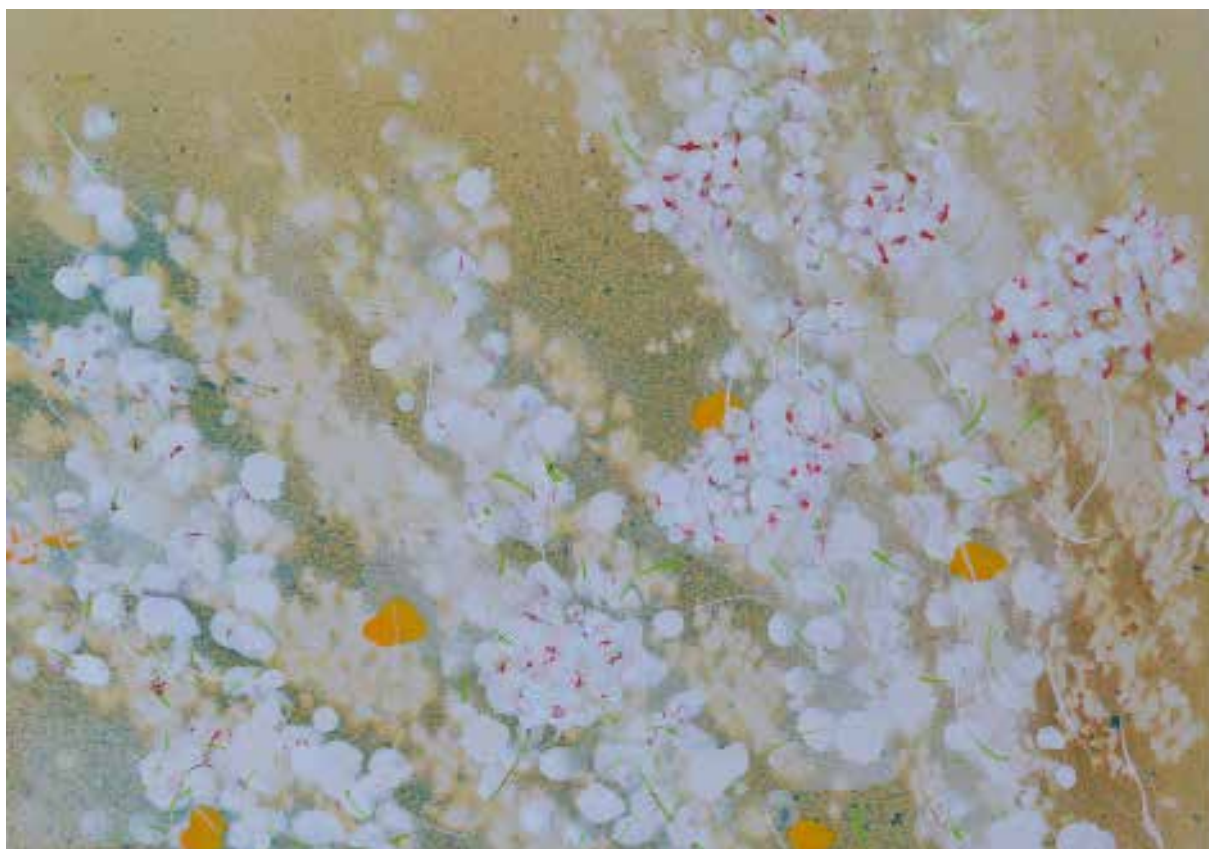
Borders, Big Yellow *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '14 60" x 79"*



Pieris Study III *Acrylic on paper '15 10" x 18"*



Pieris Study IV *Acrylic on paper '15 10" x 18"*



Pieris *Acrylic and pigments on paper '15 24" x 33"*



Red Valerian Studies I, II, III, IV *Acrylic and pigments on paper '15 8" x 12"*



Valerian Wall *Acrylic and pigments on paper '15 24" x 33"*



Orchid Study (Oncidium) II *Graphite on paper '14 18" x 10"*

Orchid Study (Oncidium) I *Graphite on paper '14 18" x 10"*



Red Valerian (Blue versions) II *Acrylic and pigments on paper '15 11" x 8"*

Red Valerian (Yellow versions) II *Acrylic and pigments on paper '15 11" x 8"*



Valerian Studies Blue I *Acrylic and pigments on paper '15 16" x 10"*

Valerian Studies Blue II *Acrylic and pigments on paper '15 16" x 10"*



Dappled, Big Red *Acrylic and pigments on canvas '15 60" x 79"*

Bob Davison

- 1954 Born Worstead, Norfolk
1973-76 BA Fine Art (Painting) West Surrey College of Art and Design
1977-78 MA Fine Art (Painting) Chelsea School of Art
1978-79 Fellowship, Cheltenham School of Art
1980 Eastern Art Minor Award
1981 - Moved to London. Worked various galleries (particularly Waddingtons and Alan Cristea). The National Gallery and V&A. National and International Artfairs. Advisor to numerous private and corporate collections including Bank of Switzerland, Alliance Capital, Simmons and Simmons and the Lodeveans Collection.
Also in '81, began part time lecturing at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education.
2001 - Moved to Randwick, Gloucestershire. Continued at Cheltenham, (by this point, the University of Gloucestershire) as Associate Senior Lecturer in various roles including Field Chair for Fine Art and Course Leader for Fine Art, Painting and Drawing.
2016 Senior Fellow of Higher Education Academy

Exhibitions

- | | | | |
|---|------|---|------|
| The Museum in the Park, Stroud. Borders | 2016 | Charles Barker, London | |
| RWA, Bristol. Drawn | 2015 | Hart Gallery, London | |
| RWA, Bristol, Autumn Exh, Bordeaux Quay | 2007 | The King of Hearts, Norwich | 1996 |
| RWA, Bristol, Autumn Exhibition | 2006 | Austin Knight, London | |
| Bewdley Gateway Exhibition. Prizewinner | | Cheltenham Open Drawing Competition, | |
| RWA, Bristol, Autumn Exhibition | 2005 | Cheltenham | |
| RWA, Bristol, Open Painting | | Works on Paper, Victoria College of the Arts, | |
| Pierrepont Fine Art, Oxford | 2003 | Melbourne | |
| Pierrepont Fine Art, Oxford | 2002 | "Greek Echoes" Contact Gallery, Norwich | 1995 |
| The Mall Gallery, London | 2001 | Works on Paper, The Library Gallery, Wimbledon | |
| Cavanacor Gallery, Lifford, Co Donegal | 2000 | Mace Ltd, London | 1994 |
| The King of Hearts, Norwich | 1999 | Summer Exhibition, Collyer Bristow Gallery, Lon | |
| The Hellenic Centre, London | | Cheltenham Group Open, Axiom Centre, | |
| Cavanacor Gallery, Lifford, Co Donegal, Ireland | | Cheltenham | |
| The Rangers House, Blackheath, London | | Rexel Derwent Drawing competition, Chelt and | |
| Hart Gallery, London | 1998 | Glos CHE | |
| 30 Years of Cheltenham Fellows. Axiom Centre, | | Summer Exh, The Gallery at John Jones, Lon | |
| Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, Pittville | | | 1993 |
| Gallery C & G CHE | 1997 | Artists in the Arts, John Jones Gallery, Lon | 1992 |

Collections

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sealink UK | Sue Chappel Trust |
| Eastern Arts Association | Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust |
| Private Bank and Trust | University of Gloucestershire |
| Bank of Switzerland | Willans and Willans |
| Simmons and Simmons | Numerous private collections |
| Famous Studio | |



The Studio



A border in July in the artist's garden

This publication is produced to coincide with an exhibition 'Borders' and the planting of
The Walled Garden Project at The Museum in the Park, Stroud, Gloucestershire in July 2016
It is not a catalogue for the exhibition as there may be works illustrated that are not in the exhibition and vice versa.

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