

John Loker



John Loker
New Works



John Loker

Sue Hubbard

*I am always doing that which I cannot do,
in order that I may learn how to do it.*

Picasso

The formidable brick building in a remote part of the Norfolk countryside, which houses John Loker's studio, was once a workhouse. While Loker inhabits one end, his partner, Emily Mayer, a taxidermist and artist, occupies the other. Each lives and works in his or her own half, though they take turns acting as the other's host. The building gives them flexibility and space to work undisturbed. Loker's studio reflects his personality. There is an area for books, computer and papers, copious plan chests and enough space to execute his large paintings flat on the floor under the high sky lights. There is also an impressive collection of harmonicas. Like cycling, harmonica music is a passion.

But what the studio really reveals is a man with an obsession for making, who constantly questions what it is a painting can do. For here is an artist engaged in a continuing dialogue with his materials, wrestling to create his own painterly language from the grammar of space, form, scale, movement and colour.

Over the years Loker's pictures have gradually become more complex because, as he says, "life is complex". He claims to have "pushed, pulled and scraped" his way through painting, sculpture, relief constructions, photography and photographic collage until, sometime in the 70s, painting became his primary focus. It simply

No Return 2 2008
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 175.5 x 180.5 cm / 69¼ x 71¼ in



Columbia Feb 2003 2009
Oil on canvas, 210 x 250 cm / 82¾ x 98½ in

presented itself as the language that contained most “words” and whose syntax he best understood.

He talks of having once been a ‘landscape painter’ and hanging his “notions of making ‘art’ onto the landscape” to suit his own ends. The horizons and horizontals are still in evidence but now the sense is of a continuous movement ‘through something’, where images and patterns repeat in an almost cinematic flow.

Yet the feeling that these paintings are grounded in the landscape persists, in that the viewer is both located within and seduced by the spaces created. In the 80s



Didn't Make the Clouds 2009
Oil on canvas, 210 x 244 cm / 82¾ x 96¼ in

Loker introduced images to act as catalysts to his imagination. Among these were the windscreen wiper, the pylon and a missile nose cone which he likened to a child's spinning top in a series called *Dangerous Games* and later inverted in the *Cathedral Series*. More recently the dominant shape, a ‘splat’ of paint resembling a dumpy little aircraft taken from a NASA photograph of the explosion on re-entry of the Columbia spacecraft in 2003 forms the central motif. In *Columbia, Feb 2003* it floats above veils of blue, and layers of complex red netting, which appear to have been cut or snipped like wire mesh, to leave raw edges. Brittle, yet fluid, this opens out onto a deep space; a black hole or a dark void

so we are left asking what is ‘real’, what is solid and fixed; how far does this, apparently, infinite space extend as we float among the gorgeous reds and midnight blues.

It is this hallmark webbing that flows across the surface of his paintings, accentuating continuous flux and movement, that makes his canvases pulsate. To achieve this complex patterning Loker has created an array of wavy wooden templates. Taking the canvas off its struts he places it on foam board so that he can walk across and straddle its surface. His relationship to these works is immensely physical.

And what is the emotion invoked? A sense of vulnerability. Things fall apart, centres do not hold. These paintings attempt to make permanent the endless cycles of dissolution and flux. In *Didn't make the Clouds*, drops of liquid make an appearance. They might be tears, they might be rain. They, too, talk of changing states, of the inevitable shift from perfection to corruption. Like modern day vanitas paintings these works remind us of life's impermanence and volatility.

Above all Loker's concern is to redirect our ways of looking at what is ephemeral and fixing it within painterly permanence. He has said he is initially drawn to an object by its beauty and function, whilst always attempting to find and develop the underlying

metaphor it implies. He has likened these images to: “the icons on a computer, the small image is a surface sign for that which is hidden beneath. Click – and they open....painting is the way I try to ‘open’ the elements.”

Thus a whale's tail has a simple beauty and can be used as a formal device and an icon. Overlaid and intertwined one against another, they suggest both the balletic movement of the most powerful animal on earth, as well as its vulnerability to man's casual destruction. Though essentially abstract the sense of light that emanates from the surrounding shades of blues in *Engulf* evokes seascapes by other British modernist painters such as Sandra Blow and Patrick Heron, for whom light on water formed part of an important vocabulary.

‘Rolling Closure’ is a term used in cycle racing to describe the way a route is closed to traffic as a race approaches and then is opened again as it passes, in order to cause the minimum disruption. Loker is intrigued by the image of a moving island of activity passing through and against the usual chaos of the traffic flow. For him it functions as a metaphor for something passive pushing relentlessly through or against something powerful, and has become symbolic of his approach to making paintings. In his works on paper there is something of this movement and tension between painting and drawing, flatness and decoration, colour and its erasure. In these gorgeous,



Re-Entry 2 2005
Acrylic and oil on paper, 42 x 102 cm / 17½ x 40¼ in

small objects - part paintings, part constructions - paint is applied with the edge of a serrated card and dragged across the surface. There is a temptation to read these largely horizontal objects as books or scrolls onto which we can project our own stories and histories but they are, above all, exercises in aesthetic composition.

Using his years of knowledge of the necessary labours involved in the construction of a painting, where scale, time and rhythm all play their part in the creation of a dynamic surface, John Loker creates works full of restless energy and compressed emotion. He knows that the feelings generated can't be disengaged from the

process of a painting's making, yet that it is only through an engagement with technical complexity that an artist can create work where the emotion appears spontaneous and immediate. For as Mark Rothko once said: "There is no such thing as a good painting about nothing".

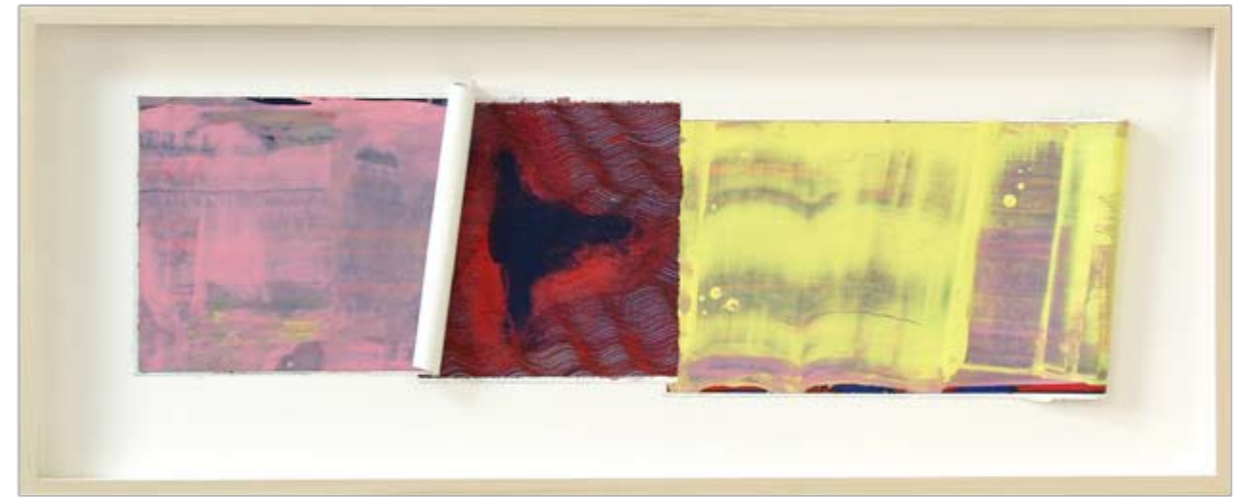
It is this synthesis of skill, of an enquiring intellect and the desire to translate overpowering emotion into something beyond the self that is at the heart of these successful paintings. Art is about finding out; it is a journey, as well as a process, which allows both artist and viewer to discover their feelings, hopes and desires and something of what it means to live in this material world.



Blue Drip 2007
Acrylic on paper, 35 x 35 cm / 14 x 14 in



Re-Entry Home Run 5 2008
Oil on paper, 45 x 119 cm / 17¾ x 47 in



Re-Entry Home Run 3 2008
Oil on paper, 45 x 112 cm / 17¾ x 44¼ in



Drop by Drop 2008
Oil on paper, 47 x 117 cm / 18½ x 46¼ in



Blue Drip 2 2008
Oil on paper, 67 x 110 cm / 26½ x 43½ in



Re-Entry Home Run 2 2008
Oil on paper, 46 x 120 cm / 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ in



Blue Erosion 2008
Oil and pigment on paper, 45 x 105 cm / 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 41 $\frac{1}{2}$ in



Dangerous Entry 2007
Acrylic on paper, 35 x 35 cm / 14 x 14 in



Dangerous Entry 2 2008
Acrylic on paper, 35 x 35 cm / 14 x 14 in



(Right) **No Return 2007**
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 157 x 153 cm / 62 x 60¼ in



Columbia Feb 2003 2009
Oil on canvas, 210 x 250 cm / 82¾ x 98½ in



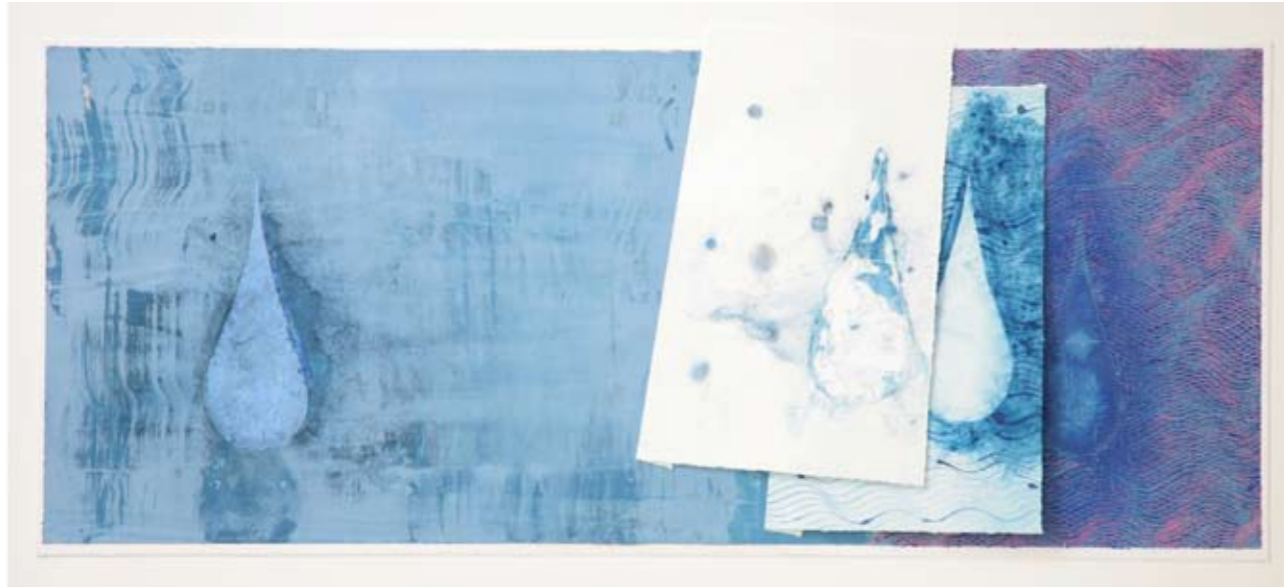
Didn't Make the Clouds 2009
Oil on canvas, 210 x 244 cm / 82¾ x 96¼ in



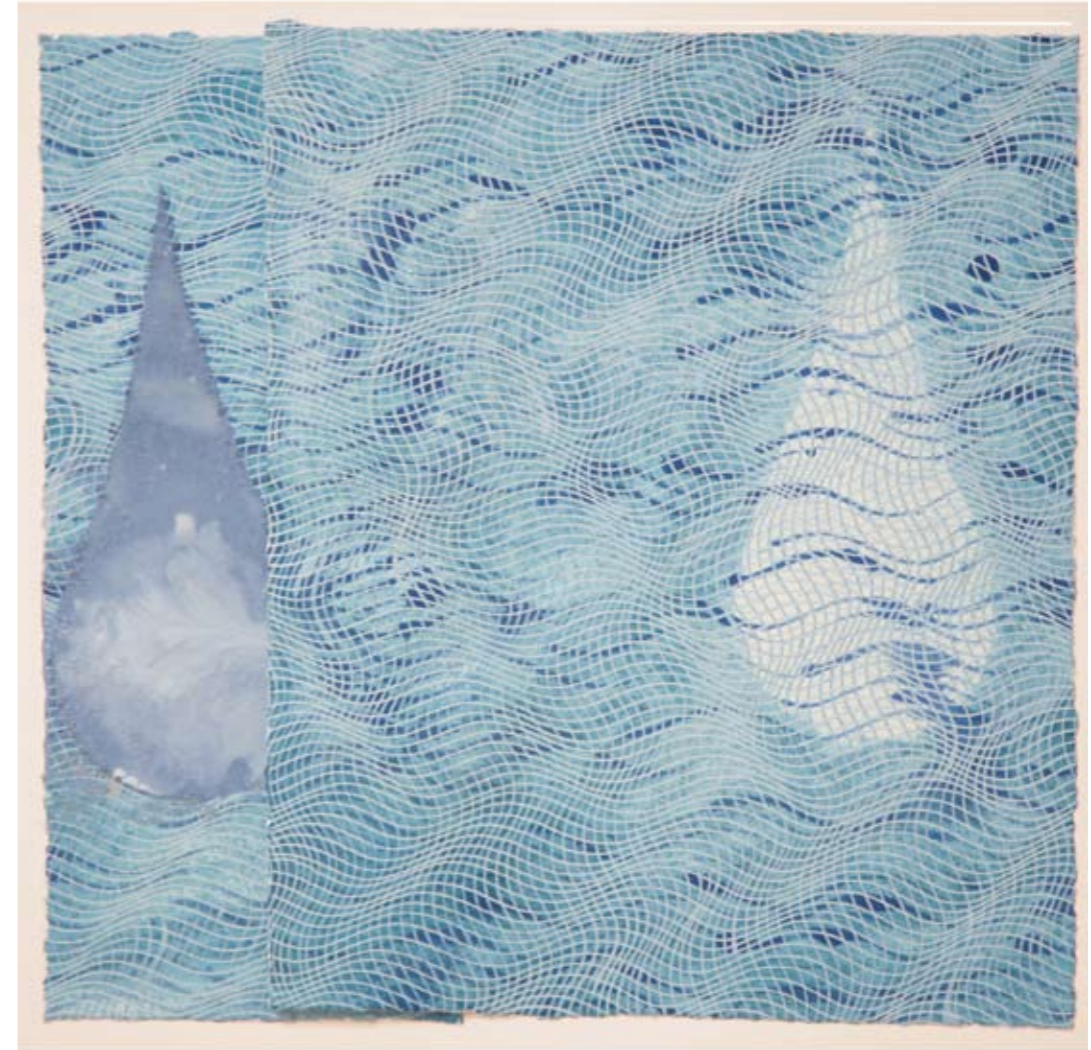
Engulf 2004-7
Oil on canvas, 175 x 180 cm / 69 x 71 in



Re-Entry Home Run 6 2008
Oil on paper, 44 x 112 cm / 17½ x 44¼ in



Blueprint for a Drop 2 2009
Oil and acrylic on paper, 59 x 112 cm / 23¼ x 44¼ in



Backdrop 2009
Acrylic on paper, 35 x 35 cm / 14 x 14 in



Blueprint for a Drop 2008

Oil and pigment on paper, 61 x 119 cm / 24¼ x 47 in

JOHN LOKER

1938 Born Leeds
 1954-58 Bradford College of Art and Design
 1960-63 Royal College of Art
 1963 Awarded Abbey Minor Travelling Scholarship

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1969 Studio Exhibition, London
 1970 Horizontals and Drawings, Angela Flowers Gallery and ICA, London
 1973 Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1975 Studio Exhibition, London
 Park Square Gallery, Leeds
 Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1978 Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 Wetering Gallerie, Amsterdam
 Park Square Gallery, Leeds
 Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1980 Wetering Galerie, Amsterdam
 1981 Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol
 Newlyn Orion, Newlyn
 Cartwright Hall, Bradford
 Newcastle Polytechnic Gallery, Newcastle
 1982 Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 Wetering Galerie, Amsterdam
 1983 Works on Paper 1970 -1983, Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1984 Galerie du Monde, Hong Kong
 1985 Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1986 Wetering Galerie, Amsterdam
 Studio Exhibition, London
 Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1988 A Decade of Prints, Flowers East, London
 Wetering Galerie, Amsterdam
 1990 Flowers East, London
 1992 Crossover, Watermans Art Centre, London
 Monoprints, Flowers East, London
 Chesil Gallery, Dorset
 1993 Flowers East, London
 1994 Angela Flowers Gallery, London.
 1995 Flowers Graphics, London
 1998 Flowers East, London
 1999 Chelsea Arts Club, London
 2001 New Monoprints, Flowers Graphics, London
 2005 Studio Exhibition, London supported by Flowers East
 2009 New Works, Flowers Central, London

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1978 Het Landschap, Gemoentelijke Van Reekumgalery, Apeldoorn, Holland
 Landscapoe to Land Art, Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter, Hovikodden, Norway
 John Moores Exhibition, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
 1979 Three Artists' Drawings, Wetering Galerie, Amsterdam
 Gallery Artists: Drawings and Prints, Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 Sixth Bradford International Print Biennale, Bradford

1980 The British Art Show: Arts Council of Great Britain, touring exhibition
 1981 Landscape, The Print-Maker's View, Tate Gallery, London
 1982 5 Via De Wetering Galerie, Stichting Beeldende Kunst, Helmond
 Landscape Prints, Brighton Polytechnic Gallery
 1984 8th British International Print Biennale, Bradford International Drawing Biennale, Rijeka, Yugoslavia
 Big Paintings, Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 A View from my Window, Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1985 Fourth Biennale of European Graphic Art, Baden-Baden
 Tolly Cobbold Eastern Arts 5th National Exhibition, Fitzwilliam, Cambridge and Tour
 Small is Beautiful, Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 1986 9th British International Print Biennale, Bradford Big Paintings, Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 4th European Print Biennale, Baden-Baden and Tour
 Side by Side, Contemporary British and Malaysian Art, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong
 Arnolfini Anniversary Show
 1987 Process and Product, Turnpike Gallery, Leigh, Greater Manchester
 Whitegates, Bradford Festival, Bradford
 Contemporary Artists, Cartwright Hall, Bradford
 Small is Beautiful Part 5, Landscapes, Angela Flowers Gallery, London
 Passage West, Angela Flowers Ireland and Crawford Arts Centre, Cork; Crawford Arts Centre, Cork
 1988 Royal College, 150 Years, Royal Academy of arts, London
 Small is Beautiful VI: Flowers East, London
 1989 Big Paintings, Flowers East, London
 Monoprints, Flowers East, London
 1990 Angela Flowers 1990, Barbican Centre London
 Intergrafik 90, Berlin, Germany
 Cubism, Blackman Harvey, London
 1991 Flowers West, Watermans, Brentford, London
 Art London '91, Olympia, London
 Angela Flowers Gallery 1991, Flowers East, London
 Art '91, Business Design Centre, London
 Recent Print Publications, Flowers East, London
 1992 The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London
 1993 10th Contemporary Art Society Art Market
 Small is Beautiful XI: Homages, Flowers East, London
 Small is Beautiful XII: Night and Day, Flowers East London Fields, London
 1994 Winner of the Nordstern Award for best print at The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.
 1995 The Twenty Fifth Anniversary Exhibition, Flowers East at London Fields, London
 Small is Beautiful XIII: Food & Drink, Flowers East, London
 1996 British Abstract Art Part 3: Works on Paper, Flowers East and Flowers East at London Fields, London
 Small is Beautiful XIV: Sex, Flowers East at London Fields, London
 Loker, Hirst, Hodgson, Flowers East, London

1997 Angela Flowers Gallery 1997, Flowers East at London Fields, London
 Print, Riverside Studios, London
 Angela Flowers Gallery (Ireland) Inc., Co.Cork
 Small is Beautiful Part XV: Death, Flowers East at London Fields, London
 1998 Small is Beautiful Part XVI: Music, Flowers East at London Fields, London
 Contemporary British Landscape, Flowers East
 Small is Beautiful: Part I, Abstract, Flowers West, Santa Monica
 2000 30th Anniversary Exhibition, Flowers East
 Small is Beautiful: Self Portrait, Flowers East at London Fields, London
 Flowers Two, Flowers Central, London
 2001 British Abstract Painting 2001, Flowers East
 Small is Beautiful XIX: Still Life, Flowers Central, London
 2002 Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy, London
 Small is Beautiful XX: Voyage, Flowers Central, London
 32nd Anniversary Exhibition, Flowers East, London
 Drawings and Works on Paper, Flowers East, London
 2003 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London
 2004 Group Show, Elm Hill Contemporary Arts, Norwich
 2005 35th Anniversary Exhibition, Flowers East, London
 2006 John Loker and Trevor Jones, The Cut, Halesworth Art Centre
 Group Show Elm Hill Contemporary Arts
 Modern British Abstracts, The Last Gallery, Zurich
 35th Anniversary Exhibition, Flowers East, London
 Small is Beautiful XXI: Flowers Central, London
 Small is beautiful XXII: Heroes, Flowers Central London
 2008 Small is Beautiful XXIII: Flowers Central, London
 2009 Small is Beautiful XXIV: Love, Flowers East, London
 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Arts Council of Great Britain
 Arthur Andersen and Co
 British Council
 Contemporary Art Society
 De Beers
 Department of the Environment
 Deutsche Bank AG, London
 Dudley City Art Gallery
 Ferens Art Gallery, Hull
 Hunterian Collection, Glasgow
 IBM
 Leeds City Art Gallery
 Lloyds TSB Group plc, London
 Manchester City Art Gallery
 Power Institute of Fine Art, Sydney
 Rugby City Art Gallery
 Tate Gallery
 Unilever
 Van Reekumgaler, Apeldoorn
 Victoria and Albert Museum
 Wakefield City Art Gallery
 Worcester City Art Gallery

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(Cover image) **Engulf** 2004-7
Oil on canvas, 175 x 180 cm / 69 x 71 in