

# Clare Woods: ‘a lot of my work is about two extremes coming together’

SIMON LEE GALLERY | SPONSORED CONTENT

In Conversation with [Jennifer Higgle](#)  
London, 27 September 2019

Clare Woods. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery. Photo: Ben Westoby.



*Doublethink* at Simon Lee Gallery (6 September–5 October 2019), [Clare Woods’](#) first solo exhibition in [London](#) in ten years, marks a change in direction in the artist’s practice. For over 20 years, Woods has expanded from her initial training as a sculptor at Bath College of Art—where she received her BA in 1994—to create abstract paintings on large sheets of aluminium. By painting these flat on the floor or on trestles, Woods has greater freedom of movement to push and sweep paint across the surface, allowing for the medium to be manipulated in a manner akin to sculpture.



At [Simon Lee Gallery](#), new motifs include flowers and her first self-portrait, titled *Ownlife* (2019), rendered in pale hues against a dark blue background, with the artist’s facial features depicted in sparse dabs of paint. Having started her career as a landscape painter, Woods gradually moved to painting objects such as rocks and sculptures, followed by the human figure in recent years; all the while maintaining her distinct style, which comprises broad strokes of paint hovering between abstraction and figuration. Interested in the connection between the landscape and national trauma, Woods’ early influences include British landscape painters such as Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland. In recent paintings, vulnerability and mortality are expressed through the human form and flowers, such as *It’s the end of the World as we know it* (2019), a large vase of peonies in the midst of shedding petals.

In this conversation, which is an edited transcript of a talk between the artist and Jennifer Higgle held at Simon Lee Gallery on 19 September 2019, Woods discusses the technical and conceptual shifts in her practice.



Exhibition view: Clare Woods, *Doublethink*, Simon Lee Gallery, London (6 September–5 October 2019). Courtesy Simon Lee Gallery.

**JH** *Doublethink* at Simon Lee Gallery includes 14 paintings, all on aluminium, which were all pretty much done in the last five months. It’s an incredibly complex, intricate, and accomplished body of work touching upon many things—some of them new for you. I’d like to start off with the title; why is the show called *Doublethink*?

**CW** I had been thinking about the show for a long time, and have been reading a lot of Orwell since the Brexit vote; it feels very contemporary of this moment. *Doublethink* is the idea of having contradictory views, and I think a lot of my work is about two extremes coming together and then meeting in the middle.

**JH** The paintings are extremely vibrant; in some ways, they hover between abstraction and figuration, but they’re also like short stories. They have very evocative titles, which often allude to songs, such as *It’s the end of the World as we know it* (2019), *Memory Hole* (2019), and *The Allnighter* (2019). You also wrote the entries for each painting in the exhibition booklet. What is the role of narrative in the work?

**CW** Titles are really important, and in the exhibition booklet I wanted to give people another way into the work. I’ve collected titles for years—I might be driving along and see a name or hear something on the radio, or read something. When the paintings are finished and I stand them up, I usually know straight away what the title will be, but I have no idea until that point.



Exhibition view: Clare Woods, *Doublethink*, Simon Lee Gallery, London (6 September–5 October 2019). Courtesy Simon Lee Gallery.

**JH** To what extent is the finished painting dictated to by its title?

**CW** None of the paintings are dictated by their titles, they always come at the end. The whole process is quite broken down, and the titling is one part of that.

**JH** We’ll talk about the conceptual side of these pictures later, but how do you physically make them? Do they begin with drawings?

**CW** All of the paintings are based on photographs. Without photography my work doesn’t exist, so it’s really important. Thousands and thousands of photographs are collected, which I select quite instinctively and draw, taking out everything that I don’t need to just leave a very slight trace. There are a few lines holding the image together, and that’s the image that then gets drawn onto the aluminium panels. I paint flat, so the painting is horizontal and that control is really important. When you’re painting while standing up, you’ve got this very small area of control, whereas when I’m walking around the painting, I’ve got much more control of the movement and pressure of the brush. I studied sculpture, so when I’m making these I think of them as objects.

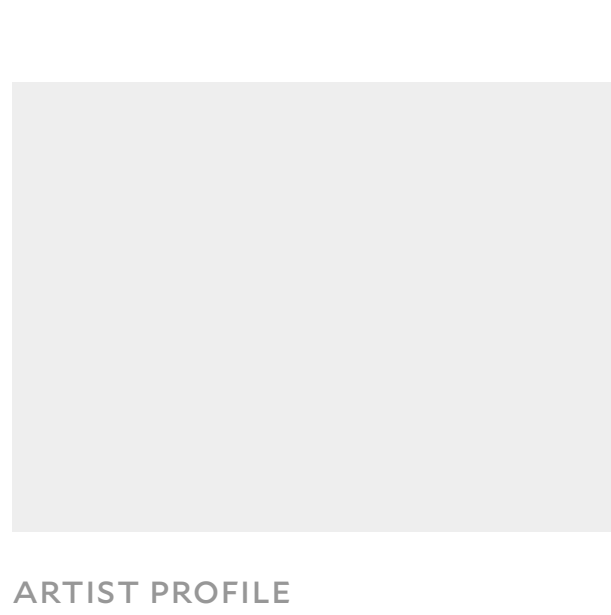
**JH** When you do this, you’re working very close up from an aerial perspective, so what you see is very different to what you worked on, in a sense. That must be quite exciting.

**CW** Yes, when I’m painting, all I’m really thinking about is colour and movement, and the movement of the brush and the weight of the brush against the surface. They’re all on white gesso, so as you push colour onto the surface, light comes through, so you can get different colours through weight rather than pigment.

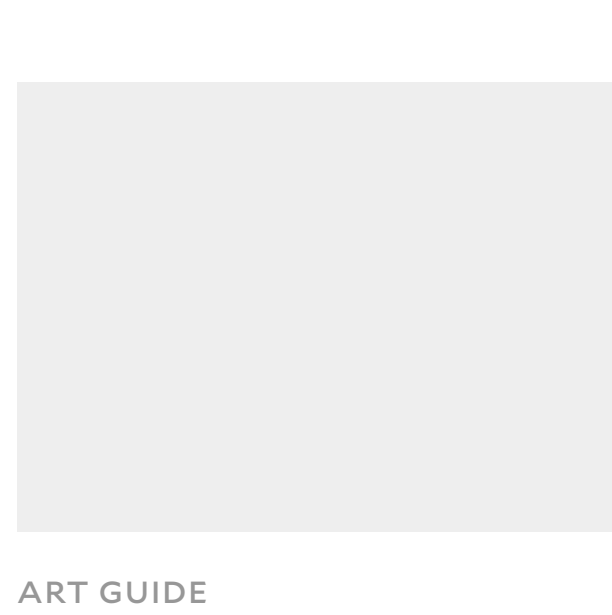
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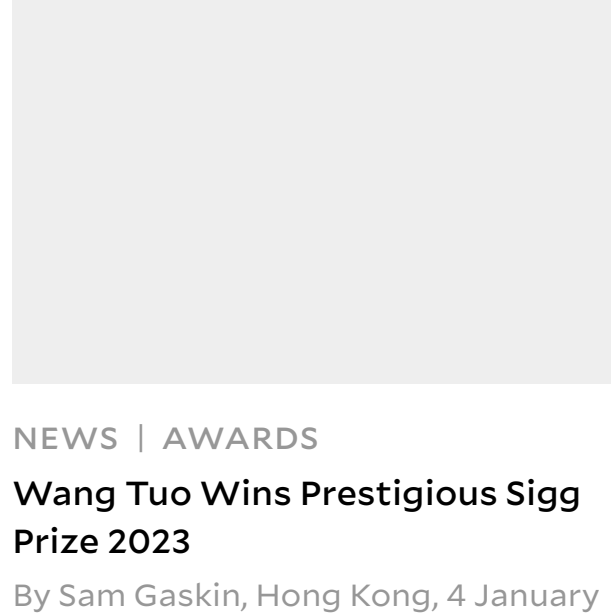


**ARTIST PROFILE**  
**Clare Woods**  
Born in 1972 in Hampshire, Clare Woods studied sculpture at Bath College of Art prior to receiving her MFA from Goldsmith’s College. London in 1999. She is a sculptor-turned-painter and is also known for her prints and works on paper. [Clare Woods](#)

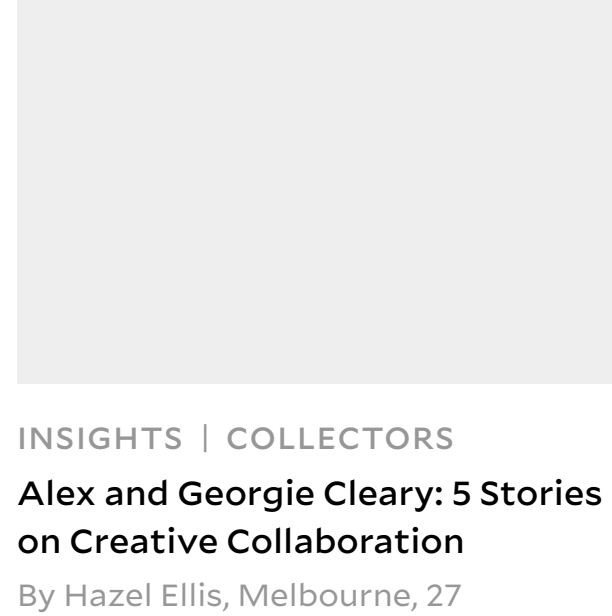


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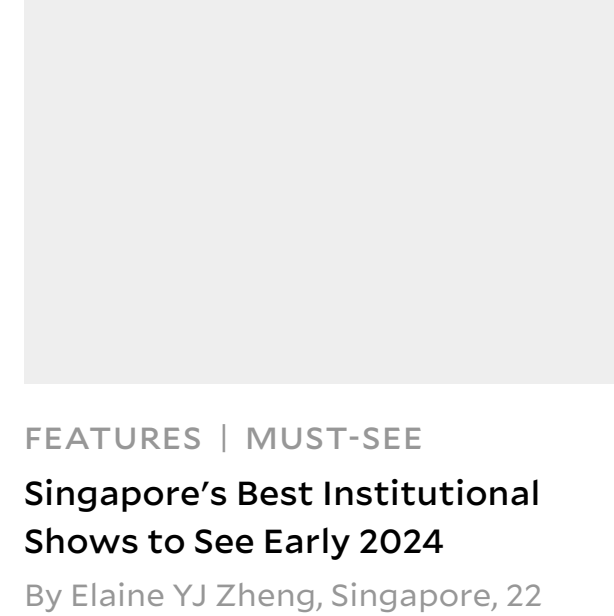
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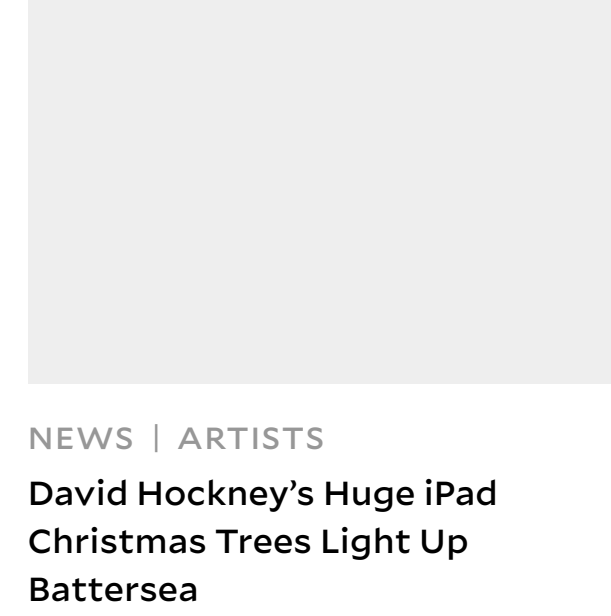
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