

Jaanika Okk Reviews Laura Lancaster at New Art Gallery Walsall

**Laura Lancaster
New Art Gallery Walsall
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Edited by Anneka French

Laura Lancaster, Montage V, 2015, oil on linen, 260x230cm, Courtesy of the artist and Workplace Gallery Gateshead/London. Photo: John David Lawson

I wasn't aware of Laura Lancaster's work before this exhibition but when I went to the private view I was mesmerised. The wide, expressive brushstrokes denoting anonymous faces and figures on large canvases are well-installed in the spacious gallery. Yet the viewer must make an effort to understand what is going on and that is what makes her work so interesting – a lot of suggestions but nothing concrete. [New Art Gallery Walsall](#) is the perfect compliment to Lancaster's paintings and drawings.

Lancaster's exhibition spreads throughout three rooms, each telling their own story. The first presents an installation of small drawings and sketches titled 'Untitled' (2007). The effect is like flicking through a stranger's photo album without knowing anything about them, which is, of course, exactly what the artist has done, inspired by a found photograph album of one woman's life. There is a narrative but somehow it has been shuffled. The sketches are made on different found materials – old paper and the inner covers of novels and sketchbooks. Next to the drawing installation are large painted canvases that depict the reverse of the photographs with some scribbled words, giving an indication of the image on the other side.

The middle room shows her 'Montage' (2015) series, in which large scale paintings depict the first and last frames of a found 8mm film. This allows the viewer to imagine the scenario of a full film based on the beginning and end scenes only. Next to the series are 24 black and white paintings, 'Apparition' (2015), depicting stills from another found film expanded over one second of time. The scenes are mixed up and the narrative is not easy to follow. This is, however, the point.

The third room is the most intimidating. It contains a series of black and white large scale paintings that encourage the imagination to wander and to play. The source photographs used depict people with animal and clown masks posed at different parties and gatherings. Each of them seem to look directly at me, as if being judged, though Lancaster's distinctive painting style does not allow exact faces to be seen through her broad brushstrokes.



Laura Lancaster, Montage XI, 2015, oil on linen, 260x230cm. Courtesy of the artist and Workplace Gallery Gateshead/London. Photo John David Lawson.

Having a printed photograph is quite a rarity nowadays. Even if we decide to have hard copy of a photograph, it will most often be derived from a digital file rather than a developed analogue photograph. I remember waiting patiently for weeks until I could see developed photographs from a family trip or another event.

Before that, my family used to organise a showing of slides, a time when all the family came together for this entertainment – a long ritual involving the installation of the screen and the operation of the slide machine. And now? A quick snap to create a digital image, preview and repeat without any anticipation or appreciation of the process itself.

Lancaster, however, is one of those artists who continues to draw inspiration from old analogue photographs and films. She presents a filtered view through her own prism, almost like being an intruder in someone else's personal memories, selecting images to present to the public. Her art is, in many ways, abstract but at the same time suggestive enough to help the viewer fill the gaps, allowing us, ultimately, to see what we want to see.

Laura Lancaster was born in Hartlepool in 1979 and lives and works in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. She is represented by [Workplace Gallery](#) in London.

The review was first published on [New Art West Midlands website](#).