

# Floorr

## Phillip Allen

By Richard Strabuck | 7 April 2024

**Could you tell us a bit about yourself and your background? Where did you study?**

I'm a painter, one of the Directors for Turps, and a programme leader for their Studio and Offsite programmes, working within a small, yet very dedicated team of other artists. I'm also a tutor on the RCA MA.

I did my BA at Kingston Polytechnic 1987-90 and my MA at the RCA 1990-92. This was back in the day when a Fine Art programme was made up of around 20 students per academic year, and we received academic grants from our local authority. Going to art school back then was seen as the lesser choice of going to university. But there was a great sense of freedom to explore ideas.

**Your paintings are incredibly textured and sculptural, giving a distinct visual and tactile feel. Can you talk about how you create these pieces and what you're trying to convey with such thick layers of paint?**

These paintings are mainly oil paint. Sometimes marble dust is used. In the past I've used dried split peas too. I generally never want to start a painting, but only continue something and so bringing a surface into being is quite a long process. The paintings need to feel empty before I can fill them, but it must be the correct type of emptiness; an emptiness that has a presence to it, which means something must be erased, but the correct thing must be erased and then erased in the correct manner. It takes a long time to achieve the 'nothingness' I need to see for then the somethingness to try and exist. Concurrently I'm drawing - I have many which offer possible motif combinations and pictorial structures.

I then try to translate the drawing schematic onto the worked painting. A sweet point occurs when these two aspects meet and then the actual painting begins.

The thick layers offer me difference, where illusion can meet abundance. I think I'm trying to convey this idea of bringing one thing to the other, bringing matter into illusion.

**In your recent interview with James Kalm about your show at Miles McEnery Gallery in NY, you mentioned that you think about the mouth, tongue, and taste when it comes to colour and paint. Could you delve deeper into how these sensory experiences influence your approach to painting and colour choices?**



*Low Memory (Curse of The So-Called Version), 2023,  
Oil on panel, 56 × 49 inches*

I was listening to something last year about Michel Serres, and his ideas of the Second Tongue, the tongue having the dual purpose of speech production and taste facilitator. Painting has great transformative mobility as does taste and I was pondering these two shared common qualities. It's a little synesthetic thing, but also perhaps allowing other sensory receptors to get in the act. The representations in my mind which focuses my painting aren't sometimes best served through a lexicon of language based in sight, so playing with other possibilities are interesting to me. A well-used common example would be thinking about how "cooked" a painting is, rather than thinking whether it is finished or not.

**Even though your paintings are very material-focused, they often give off an ethereal or cosmic vibe. How do you blend the physical aspects of paint with these almost dreamlike elements, and what do you want viewers to feel or think when they see this mix?**

My paintings contain quite differing surfaces, the rougher and more undulated surfaces towards the edge with a smoother edited central surface. Both surfaces require a slightly different painterly approach. As I mentioned earlier, the motif or image in each painting is arrived at through a rather long process. I like the idea that you feel they are blended together because a lot of the time these two aspects feel very disparate. I want to avoid the edges being too frame-like and so leaking the illusional aspect of the painting into the impasto edges is a long task. Generally, it's achieved through colour management and trying to impose a visual rhythm onto the painting using principles of perceptual gestalt - similarity, continuation, closure, proximity, figure/ground, and symmetry.

I want the viewer to be presented with two paradoxical registers that are at once unified and separated, a bit like the rabbit / duck visual illusion.

**Tell us a bit about how you spend your day / studio routine? What is your studio like?**

I like to get to the studio early and so will leave the house by around 6.30am and get to the studio just after 7.00am. I like to listen to Resonance Extra in the car which hopefully will be playing some sound-artists' field recordings. In the winter, I like getting to the studio when it's still dark and won't put on any studio lights, but will wait until the sun rises for light. I don't mind painting in the half-light. Colour is virtually unperceivable but tonal values can be thought about. I drink plenty of coffee so that with my profound morning tiredness it provides me with the weird unreal substrate to begin my day.

Painting will be in fits and starts, trying to work out where I am with things.

**What artwork have you seen recently that has resonated with you?**

I'm very lucky as if I'm not painting, I'm talking to other painters at Turps or when I'm in at the RCA. I find these artists always inspire me and there is something in every painting that I look at which resonates with me.

**Is there anything new and exciting in the pipeline you would like to tell us about?**

The last few years have been rather busy. I'm really looking forward to having a period of extended time in the studio where I can hunker down and push things even more.



*Low Memory (Mis Readings of The Obvious Version),*  
2023, Oil on panel, 40 1/2 x 33 1/2 inches