

‘Let the dishes air-dry, the way
You let your hair after a shampoo. All evaporates, water,
Time, the
Happy moments and – harder to believe – the unhappy. Time on a bus,
That passes, and the night with its burthen and gift of dreams.’
James Schuyler, *Hymn to Life* (1974)

I gaped at the television in horror when the neuroscientist David Eagleman cheerily announced that our brains don’t have the capacity to maintain all our memories. To counteract this, the brain regularly performs a systematic process of cataloguing, taping over those it deems old and unnecessary. It seems the amount of data storage being offered by our personal cloud is not an unlimited deal: days, months, possibly even entire years are called forward to prove their worth or risk deletion.

‘Memory is a seamstress, and a capricious one at that’, writes Virginia Woolf in *Orlando* (1928). ‘Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, or what follows after.’ And like Woolf’s figure of memory stitching together fabric off-cuts, Sally Anderson uses the painting surface as a repository for her memories and experience. Whether it is by a smear or a single drip, these moments are built up, fixed in place, marked and stored. But the same surface is also governed by an almost compulsive process of accretion, of painting over, of borrowing, swapping, and repainting again. Even as each memory is affixed to the canvas, it is being hidden away and erased from view.

I have, like most, many memories I would dearly like to direct my brain to override (those filled with shame, the selfish infliction of pain), but just as many I am terrified to lose. Sally returns to her canvas; I return to these recollections to make sure their lustre hasn’t dimmed. But Sally is also interested in another type of memory, one that I suspect is the first to fall victim to the brain’s cleaning sweep – the records of everyday, seemingly insignificant events and actions: picking up a damp sock from the washing basket with one hand and a peg in the other before pinning it on the line, finding a couple of wet blades of grass stuck resolutely to the side of your heel.

Many of the works in *Self Storage and the Really Real* have the feel of a landscape or still life – there are the references to Tweed River, the thin spines of hydrangea stems, the direct copies of the paintings of Sally’s friends and lover. Then again, there are also oblique allusions to screens and to the archives of images that can be neatly contained on a phone. But the works themselves slip away from easy methods of classification – can you really say real memories are being catalogued with paint or are they just approximations of them? (Whenever I write about Sally’s work there’s always a tumbling list of adjectives, a heap of descriptors that come rushing out: they are receptacles, rooms, windows, frames, all at once, with no joining clauses.)

Paint here is being used in much the same way that we attach ourselves to a certain song or pocket a souvenir. It’s a form of synecdoche, a literary term that refers to a part standing in for the whole (my favourite: ‘I could use an extra pair of hands’). The painting that you see before you both is and isn’t the point – it’s a stand-in, a marker of process, of the thoughts and experiences that went into it, of all that has been concealed. It’s like looking at your collection of books neatly lined up on the

shelf: you know that you have read them, but can only recall snatches and fragments of their whole. And yet it is in looking at them that you become aware of the weight and thickness of their memory, and even though you may only have an intimation of this, it is the intimations that last.