Rosalind Nashashibi, *Hooks*

Audio Description by Elaine Lillian Joseph

If you enter via the connecting door from Carolyn Lazard’s exhibition *Long Take*, there is an immediate contrast in brightness. Moving from a dim, black-painted chamber into a crisp white walled gallery, Rosalind Nashashibi’s show *Hooks* is illuminated with slithers of lighting along the grid-panelled ceiling and natural light. 15 paintings, all completed between 2022 to 2023, are arranged within a wide rectangular room and each work is afforded a generous amount of space. There are also three white standalone partition walls. The first two are in a row nearest to the south wall and the third is on the far side, opposite the north wall.

A mixture of oil on linen and oil on canvas, lush colours imbue a dreamy quality to her works, especially red and green. Motifs modulate from one painting to the next. Voyeurs are framed between disembodied legs or through elaborate hand fans and animals show up as both spectators and portrait sitters. Scenes are split horizontally or vertically with strict divisions of colour and often further bisected by shutters or curtains.

We start on the south wall nearest to the doors with a view through a frameless window. Gold curtains border the scene, the material falling in pleats on the right and left side. Completed in 2023 ***Joyous recognition, a smile rises up from the deep*** is 150 x 120cm and oil on linen. Three horizontal blocks of colour, green on top, then ocean blue then grey at the bottom, divide the painting and they continue past the right curtain which doesn’t quite touch the edge of the frame. An upside-down speech bubble manifests from a smiley face with horns. It says the equation: “Seven divided by 1 equals”. We tilt our heads to read this and realise the whole scene is inverted, the smile appearing like a frown rising over the threshold between grey and blue.

***Rest before change*** from 2022 is the first painting hanging on the west wall. It’s an oil on linen, measuring 70 x 60cm.

From a distance, this is a window with the shutters latched shut with a hook. On the right side a muted washed out grey veils a row of even horizontal lines beneath, the suggestion of closed slats. The inner edge of the shutters are painted a bold yellow and this vertical stripe divides the canvas neatly in two. This is further divided by a grey line as if marking out two separate lanes on an empty road. The grey line loops over itself in the middle like a crossed lowercase t. The loop or the shutter hook forms a bridge over the road, pointing right to left. It strikes a dramatic change in direction, leading confidently away from the faded right to the bold, deep blue of the slats on the left.

On the first standalone partition wall is ***Slow Rush*** from 2023. This is opposite ***Joyous Recognition*.** Two canvases are joined together, each measuring 30 x 40cm or 60 x 40cm altogether and they are oil on linen.

Four figure-of-eight knots swim above a nebula of sprawling colours. The first canvas is a dark storm of swirls that surge out of the left bottom corner. A nebula of reds, blues and yellows strive for space at the far end of thesecond canvas, straining out of the darkness. The knots are suspended as if in slow motion amid the frenetic chaos

On the second standalone partition wall is our first human figure. ***Woman in a Boat*** is from 2023 and is oil on linen, measuring at 100 x 95cm.

A naked woman is sitting in a rowboat, her skin a blueish pink. With one hand resting on the side of the boat, her legs are slightly bent and spread wide open. The soles of her feet almost touch. A scrawl of blue and red strokes obscures her body from the belly button down and masks her crotch. Her head is bowed and her gaze is fixed between her legs, one hand nonchalantly resting on the edge of the boat. Behind her the water appears a dreamy green. Lily pads float on the sun-tinged surface.

On the other side of this partition is ***Blue Shutters*** from 2022. This oil on linen is 130 x 120cm.

A face looms large behind a pair of blue shutters, its gaze cool. The slats are partially open, revealing heavy-lidded, steely blue eyes and high arched eyebrows. Their pink skin stretches to the extremity of the painting. Two shutter hooks rear their curled heads in the right and left bottom corners like question marks and a third hook latches the shutters tightly closed. The eye latch is positioned at the same level as the person’s nose, creating the disconcerting illusion of a pierced, flared nostril.

On the other side of the first partition is ***Heavy Moth*. Reminiscent of *Joyous Recognition*,** this employs a similar framing effect that gives the illusion of moving past the scene. This painting is from 2022, is oil on linen and measures 150 x 120cm.

Two red pillars cut across the scene, one on the extreme left and the other not quite touching the right edge of the frame, as if captured mid-swing. The pillars have the braided configuration of rope and are bordered in green. The scene is split horizontally in three. The top third is a thin pale horizon. Below this is a deep blue with short brush strokes that mimic waves. And finally a strip of lighter, brighter blue. Each block continues past the drapes on the right. A black moth takes up the majority of the bottom layer, its velvety black wings spread out on either side of its insect body. It also resembles an oversized bow tie that’s sunk to the depths.

The red and green drapes act as a precursor to the upcoming trio of paintings which are all concerned with those two complementary colours. The first two are positioned on the west wall.

***Shone Upon*** and ***Red on green*** are both oil on linen. The former is 120 x 130cm and stages a blank green sign against an exposed red brick wall. It’s elevated on three posts and has six panels divided into two columns with three on one side and three on the other. Light hits the right side, lending the sign a subtle radiance. This effect illuminates some of the bricks in its wake, creating a shimmering effect.

***Red on green*,** is smaller, at 24 x 30cm.

A bold red bow tie hangs from its loop. The pleated folds of the material are darker and the edges seem to reflect light. The background is a wash of red to green and as the two colours blend and contrast, new shades emerge.

The culmination of this study is ***Clockdancer*** which hangs on the north wall. This 2020 painting is oil on canvas and is the biggest of the trio, measuring 150 x 120cm.

A round red clock face takes up the entirety of the canvas. Each quarter is written in Roman numerals. In the lower half of the clock face, a pair of dancing legs stand out in a striking green. One leg is cocked over the other, mid-leap. The top half of the clock face bears the imprint of the rest of the body, its head, torso and arms faded into the red background as if erased by time. With arms flung wide, each hand bears the green-stained trace of a flower in its palm.

***The Yellow Dress (Morisot with a fan)*** and ***The Dog in the Mirror*** also hang on the north wall. Both are oil on linen. Measuring150 x 130cm, ***The Yellow Dress*** was completed in 2022.

A woman in a long yellow dress is sitting on a chair positioned before a set of ornate gates. The gates are shut and their railings rear up like walking sticks or erect snakes with their heads bowed ominously towards the woman. She’s holding an open fan over her head and the folds crown and obscure her hair. Her other hand is draped nonchalantly over her lap. She peers through the spread out slats that meet at the handle head. On the other side of the gate is a dog on all fours, its narrow eyes directed at the woman in a frown. Hovering above the threshold of the gate is a butterfly or a moth, on the left side. The gauze-like membrane of its wings outlined in a ghostly white.

Animals become the central figures of the next two paintings, casting them as portrait sitters in their own right.

***The Dog in the mirror*** from 2023 is much smaller than the previous painting, measuring 30 x 24cm.

Mostly blue and red, this features a front-facing portrait of a dog wearing a bow tie. Its eyes stare fixedly ahead and the bottom row of its gleaming teeth are bared. Clock numbers are painted around its face in a circle, starting with 12 at the top then 3, 6 and 9 in their usual quarter positions. The reddish ginger of its fur blends into the gloomy blue background.

***Big Cat*** is on the third partition wall and lives up to its title. Made in 2023, it’s oil on linen and 120 x 130cm.

Disembodied kitten heads peep out of a red brick wall. Six stacked along the left bottom side and two nestled within an irregular black mass that’s heaped on the wall. On closer inspection, pointed ears, the circular suggestion of eyes and the tapered tip of a nose, gradually form the shape of a big cat. It's in loaf position, its tail tucked under its body and its paws just poking out.

On the other side of the standalone wall, ***Blink, Flip*** from 2023 pairs two separate canvases. Unlike ***Slow Rush*,** these are not joined together but are positioned closely. The oil on linen square paintings are 40 x 40cm or 40 x 80 altogether.

The first canvas recalls the horizontal three-part division of ***Joyous Recognition*** and ***Heavy Moth*.** The top block is a greenish horizon, the middle is a deep blue and the last layer has a teal quality. Nothing obstructs or interrupts these thick slabs of colour. The moment of blink and flip happens in the small gap between the two. The second canvas repeats the three horizontal blocks but embellishes the composition. The top is an overcast white, the middle is an oceanic blue and the bottom is the darkest blue in either canvas. There is a subtle halo of pink around the edge of each painting. A pair of ghostly legs clad in boots straddle the scene, planted slightly apart. The transparent legs are pearlescent in their ethereal whiteness, intangible like the moth in ***The Yellow Dress***.

Along the east wall are two paintings closely related in theme and composition. The first is titled ***Malvolio*** painted between 2020 and 22. This is an oil on linen, measuring 60 x 80cm.

A red haired woman is perfectly framed between a pair of legs clad in yellow stockings. These legs, presumably belonging to Malvolio from Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night, are bound in garters that criss-cross in a diamond pattern and there’s a small fish symbol on the right leg. The redhead peers from behind her opera glasses, one hand clutching the long extended arm. Her black saucer eyes are magnified in the glasses lenses to cartoonishly exaggerated proportions.

We end with ***Phosphorus Malvolio*** which was completed in 2020. This variation on the theme of Malvolio is oil on canvas and measures 60 x 75cm.

A woman is perfectly framed between a pair of legs clad in yellow stockings. Malvolio’s legs are bound in garters that criss-cross in a diamond pattern and the yellow has a radioactive glow. Unlike the previous depiction of Malvolio, this painting affords a glimpse of his shoes. One foot is coquettishly pointing to the right, the heel just raised off the ground as if he’s about to turn and leave. The woman, who is holding a luxurious red feathered fan is robed in a lilac dress that is mostly a triangular blur. She spies Malvolio’s legs through the spread out slats that meet at the handle head of her fan and fit her face like a mask, in a similar fashion to the earlier painting, **The Yellow Dress**. Her eyes are the only feature that are given definition (apart from Malvolio’s garters!) and her gaze is wide, aching and transfixed.