TRAPPED IN AMBER

Exhibition view Stephen Newton, *Trapped in Amber*, Galerie Ariane C-Y, October 2026.

CATALOGUE

TRAPPED IN AMBER

STEPHEN NEWTON

Galerie Ariane C-Y is delighted to present Stephen Newton's first solo exhibition in France. Born in 1948, the artist lives and works in Cleethorpes, in the north-east of England. The gallery is exhibiting a selection of about twenty oil on canvas created between 2009 and 2025.

Stephen Newton's painting is striking for its materiality: thick and expressive, almost sculptural. Layers of colour build up, tracing the irregular contours of the canvases. Mike von Joel describes it as a 'heavy gestural and highly charged – physical, in fact – technique [...] disintegrating into an abstraction when viewed up close'[1]. Yet it is within this generous, dynamic material that the painter seals his most intimate unconscious emotions. 'Ouch!' he exclaims when the canvas is finished. This momentary discomfort proves to him that he has achieved his goal.

Trapped in Amber thus compares his approach to a form of crystallisation. The fossilised emotion becomes fixed within the painting.

Stephen Newton has been drawing and painting since childhood. In the early 1980s, he turned to abstraction. Indeed, the artist still describes himself as an abstract painter, despite having returned to figurative art in the late 1980s. Stephen Newton gained an M.A. in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University in 1986, an M.A. in Art and Psychotherapy from the University of Sheffield in 1993 and a PhD in the psychoanalysis of the creative process, Department Of Psychiatry, University of Sheffield in 1998. Stephen Newton was appointed Visiting Lecturer at several universities in the UK and has published three books. The artist has been exploring the creative process for over thirty years focusing on the analysis of the psyche. His relationship with art history has been shaped primarily through books, rather than through direct contact with the works that preceded him. The artist is particularly interested in Primtive Art, naïve art, Art Brut and children's art. The icons he discovered in Greece also left a lasting impression on him due to the permanence of their structures and motifs.

Both these characteristics stand out in Stephen Newton's works. Most of his compositions

Stephen Newton, *The Christening,* detail, oil on canva, 33 x 33 cm, 2025.

play with a flat perspective, accentuated by spaces structured through colour. Each wall is given a distinct colour, which creates depth. Although the artist's palette has evolved over the decades, browns and greens dominate, set off by pinks, oranges and yellows, and, more rarely, red. Blue remains a marginal colour; like purple, it is most often used for objects or architectural details. White and black, used in their pure form or broken down into grey, always anchor the composition: a black line defines the base of a wall, a white motif stands out… But the unity of the flat colour disappears as the eye draws closer to the surface of the canvas.

Stephen Newton uses colour through a succession of layers that blend in places. His use of colour shows is lack of interest in naturalism. Formations and shadows have no place in his painting. Stephen Newton prefers texture, which has become even thicker over the past ten years. Some motifs are rendered almost as bas-reliefs, so much so that the sheer quantity of paint defines their contours. These excessive impasto effects are gradually replacing the black outline, though without supplanting it entirely.

Stephen Newton places a limited range of objects within his colourful interiors. Everything

seems to have shrunk: an armchair, a coffee table, a vase, a fruit bowl. The human figure, virtually absent, often appears indirectly in a painting, a photograph or a mirror. The painter emphasises the deliberate absence of narrative, symbolism or meaning.

There is no hidden internal logic or meaning to be deciphered. Stephen Newton prefers the structure of a dream to the depiction of real life. The result feels like a succession of generic and plausible settings. A seemingly pointless banality links them and evokes a sense of uncanniness.

Through the almost obsessive repetition of his motifs, Stephen Newton frees himself from any interpretation. Yet the artist employs a religious vocabulary. He speaks of *icons* when referring to his works. He also alludes to their power to *exorcise* past traumas. The painter depicts a crucifix (*Asylum*) in a hospice room, baptismal fonts (*Font* and *The Christening*), and evokes a vigil (*Vigil*). The painter even draws inspiration from the Annunciation (*After the visit*). Nevertheless, these references are intended more to evoke a broader spirituality. Painting itself remains the central subject of all Stephen Newton's works. 'After all there is only an emptiness,' he explains.[2]

Mike von Joel, publisher, editor and art critic, links Newton's works to feelings of 'isolation, ignorance, inadequacy and fragility'[3]. According to him, the creative act offers a form of redemption. It is the window opening onto a landscape (*Room with a View of the Seafront*, *Time passes Slowly*), the promise of an escape – a staircase (*Hallway with a Staircase*) or a door (*Hallway Door*) that breaks the isolation. The uncanniness and ambiguity that emanate from his compositions – indeed, their very silence – aim to forge an intimate connection with the artwork. Stephen Newton seeks to trigger an unconscious emotion in the viewer, one far stronger than mere formal appreciation.

Stephen Newton's painting commands attention through its intensity and radicalism. His formal vocabulary, limited to a few almost totemic objects, is revitalised through colour and texture. The artist's vitality is conveyed through the explosive, gestural energy on the surface of the canvas. Stephen Newton tells me about his sketchbooks and all the canvases he has in mind. *Trapped in Amber*: his future works are already crystallised within him, ready to emerge.

1. Mike von Joel, *Looking Inwards*, *in* exhibition catalogue *Stephen Newton: Abstract Realisms*, Bermondsey Project Space, London, 2016.
2. Stephen Newton, *Painting: a lost art*, *in* exhibition catalogue *Abstract Realities*, Bermondsey Project Space, London, 2018.
3. Mike von Joel, op.cit.

Stephen Newton, *Winter through a Window*, detail, oil on canva, 71,5 x 64 cm, 2018.

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Stephen Newton, *Font,* oil on canvas, 189 x 188 cm, 2025.

Stephen Newton, *After the Visit,* oil on canvas, 140 x 129 cm, 2023.

Stephen Newton, *Time Passes Slowly,*
oil on canvas, 108 x 122 cm, 2025.

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Stephen Newton, *Table with a Bowl of Fruit,* oil on canvas, 46 x 51,5 cm, 2020.

Stephen Newton, *Hallway Door,* oil on canvas, 87 x 76,5 cm, 2020

Stephen Newton, *Room with a View of the Seafront,* oil on canvas, 61,5 x 91,5 cm, 2021.

Stephen Newton, *Room with an Armchair and Table,* oil on canvas, 32 x 39 cm, 2025.

Stephen Newton, *The Christening,* oil on canvas, 33 x 33 cm, 2025.

Stephen Newton, *The Meeting,* oil on canvas, 45 x 39 cm, 2025.

Stephen Newton, *Hallway with a Staircase,* oil on canvas, 39 x 39 cm, 2018.

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Stephen Newton, *Bowl of Fruit on a Table,* oil on canvas, 102 x 87 cm, 2013.

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Stephen Newton, *Front Room,* oil on canvas, 36 x 46,5 cm, 2016.

Stephen Newton, *Armchair by a Table with Blue Vase,* oil on canvas, 26 x 31 cm, 2017.

Stephen Newton, *Room with a Rural View,* oil on canvas, 33,5 x 44,5 cm, 2017.

Stephen Newton, *Open Window,* oil on canvas, 31 x 42 cm, 2017.

Stephen Newton, *Winter through a Window,* oil on canvas, 71,5 x 64 cm, 2018.

Stephen Newton, *Road in Winter,* oil on canvas, 26 x 36 cm, 2013.

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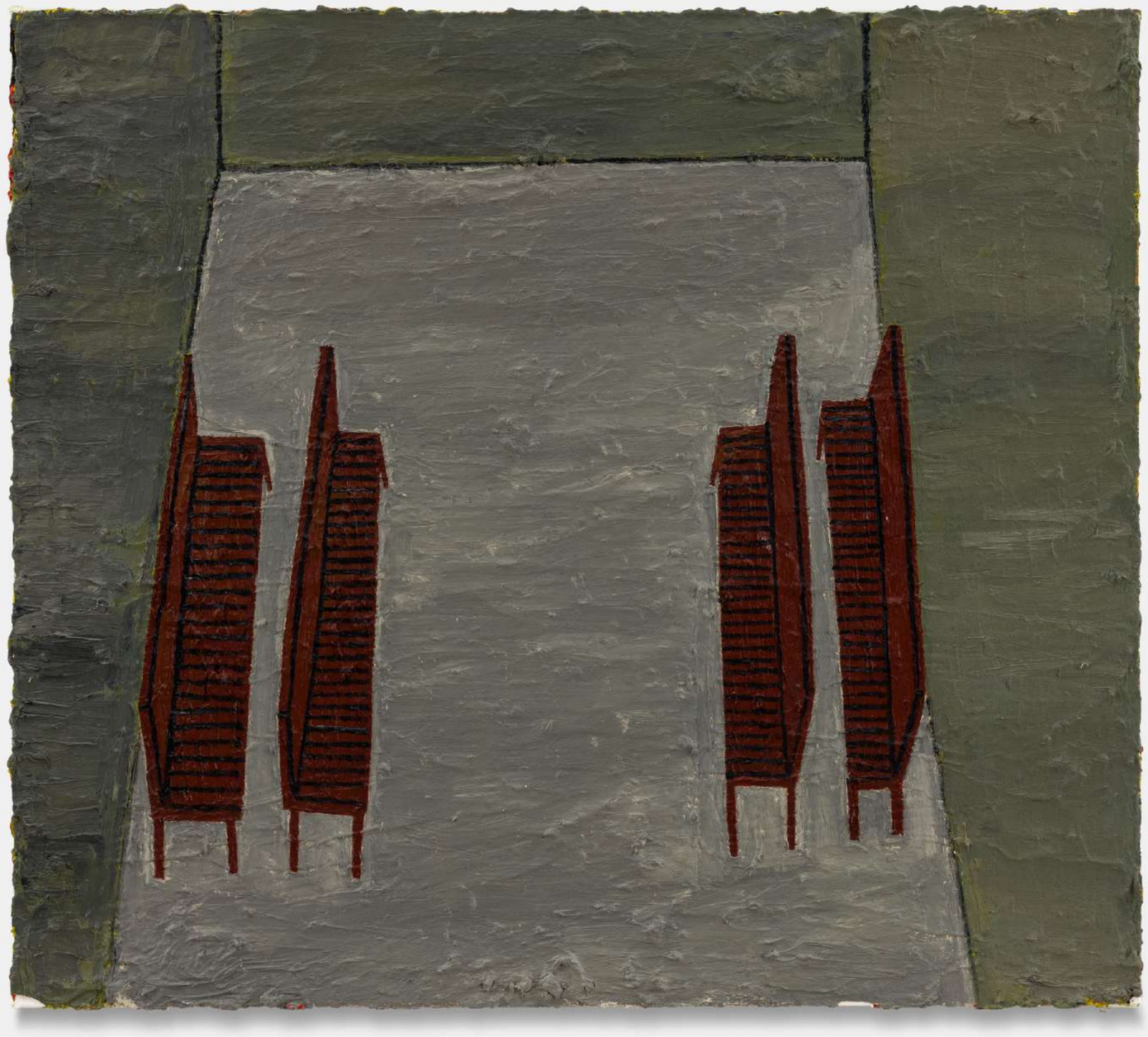
Stephen Newton, *Dark Night Outside,* oil on canvas, 49 x 41,5 cm, 2015.

Stephen Newton, *Asylum,* oil on canvas, 64,5 x 77 cm, 2015.

Stephen Newton, *Vigil,* oil on canvas, 61 x 66 cm, 2015.



Stephen Newton, *Grey Chamber,* oil on canvas, 77 x 87 cm, 2016.

Stephen Newton, *Table with a Clock and a Photograph*,
oil on canvas, 71,5 x 82 cm, 2011.

Stephen Newton, *Room with a Coffee Table,* oil on canvas, 46,5 x 38,5 cm, 2011.

Stephen Newton, *Room with a Portrait and a Large Mirror,* oil on canvas, 38,5 x 28,5 cm, 2013.

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Stephen Newton, *Empty Chair by Vase of White Flowers,* oil on canvas, 31 x 31 cm, 2009.

More info on the gallery and the artists :

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