

With Babington, process is picture. Layering and building paint, creating areas that recede and spring forth; that block and give way. Babington is fearless in putting colour to work; laying down hues in rapid succession; knitting and blending and contorting colour on the trail of a composition that Babington thinks should be hard to undo. There are worm-holes too; tantalising glimpses into earlier stages of the painterly process that seem to double as portals to distant climes. She uses oil paint exclusively, ignoring the rule about fat-over-lean and by allowing the mishaps and mistakes that invariably follow to find expression, Babington creates fault lines, cracks, blobby agglomerations upon, and next to which, passages of real control and painterly intelligence are built.

Suzy Babington thinks of her paintings as contraptions. Umbrellas feature regularly in her work, and umbrellas are contraptions - and when contraptions go wrong, as umbrellas often do on windy days, the results are comical and chaotic: think Buster Keaton and his generation of visual gag artists. They didn't need colour at all, of course. Like painting, those old films didn't need dialogue, either. As Norma Desmond crowed in a rare moment of lucidity: '*We didn't need talk, we had faces*'. Bloodless faces composed of large, wandering theatrical eyes and overly-knitted, painted-on brows and twitchy noses and moustachioed mouths and lips pursed in fits of pique; coquettish faces; disapproving faces... exaggerated faces. Faces did the talking and so did bodies and limbs – limbs as animated contraptions going into battle with the never-alive – ladders, pianos, umbrellas, even paintings, those dead old things cinema had a new use for, bashing the madcap over the head with them. In cartoons stars materialise and birds circle when madcap characters receive blows to the head. Dorothy's concussion whisks her over the rainbow but Babington knows there's no place like home. Home is down here, defined by viscera and touch.

The cool mechanics of cinema, its white light and celluloid, is far from the hot colour and mud Babington uses to transport herself and her audience. Music adds fuel to the fire of these awake-dreams. Babington's paint is permeated with the R&D (rhythm and desire) brimming in classics like *Love Come Down* by Evelyn "Champagne" King, *Got To Be Real* by Cheryl Lynn and, of course, *Bad Girls* by Donna Summer. Babington can't keep still as she smears, squeezes and spreads paint as if it were cream cheese on crackers, or jam on rye. In her approach lies acceptance of a world that often stinks, a world that is silly and muddled and a bit trippy. A world where restraint, dignity, tradition and order is punctured by slapstick at every turn. Babington skips along the fault lines surveying the divide... and if oil and acrylic weren't so readily available, then it's as if shit and sick, cream cheese and jam, and all sorts of other worldly secretions and substances, would have done. '*No fear*' appears to be Babington's mantra in the studio and she isn't the least bit shy there. What she is in person is a different matter – a private matter – but when painting, Babington is confident, rude, rambunctious; qualities that, if not shot through with concentration, would leave her paintings untethered. Unlike Dorothy, whose dreams of escape are attainable only through the

portal of slumber, Babington has access to a world of colour and imagination every time she visits her studio. And with her mixtape playing and an assortment of paints at the ready, she inhabits a space all her own and of her own making – a unique, rare, generous space – one, astonishingly, conjured up out of the endless corridors of grey matter that exist in her brain.

--- An introduction to the works of Suzy Babington. By Chris Shaw. (curator and owner of Three Works Gallery, Scarborough UK.)