

IAN Grose has these insanely intense eyes comprised of a blue outer ring and what is quite obviously a supernova bursting forth all greenly from the black holes of his pupils. Another thing I notice about him, as he turns from the business of touching up a picture frame with a dab of white, are his jutting cheekbones. He's a lanky guy, but these aren't the kind of cheekbones one achieves through active undernourishment. No. These cheekbones just are.

He's wearing a black coat, into the pockets of which he keeps propelling his hands with a kind of introverted pride as he takes me through the gallery, piece by piece, talking about his work.

"Where do you want to start?" I say.

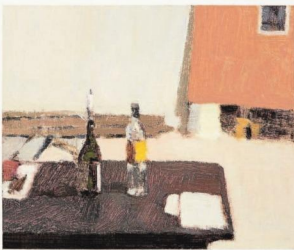
"Well... here," he says.

"Is there any specific point? Any specific narrative?"

"Narrative is a word that never comes into my thinking, to be honest."

When he says this I feel that, by uttering the word "narrative", I've already overstepped a boundary into arty pretentiousness that a real artist like Grose deplores and that, for me, much of the rest of the interview is going to be about trying to redeem myself from this blunder by subtly re-emphasizing that I, too, think "narrative" is an absurd term.

But later I see that Grose wasn't being disdainful at all. What he was, and, is, saying, is that the process of his painting, of making a piece of art, is not reliant on a structure or a story or a damned narrative; it's reliant on in-



View from my desk, 2022, oil on linen, 24 x 20 cm. © Ian Grose. Courtesy Stevenson. Photo: Mads Tønder

OIL AT SEA

For Ian Grose, now showing in Joburg, being lost is the only way to paint, he tells **Oliver Roberts**

stability, on not-knowing-what-comes-next and just basically not understanding what the hell you're doing at all until the piece is actually finished, and even then not really.

"When I was in high school, I had this quote on my bedroom wall that said, 'You're lost as soon as you know what the result will be'. I really enjoy the paradox of how being involved in the making of the work is, in a sense, being lost. You don't know where you are, you have to find your way."

"I have been thinking a lot about the unconscious or subconscious roots, the successful ones, and then more on a micro-level the unconsciousness of mark-making, of just detaching my intentional mind a little bit."

"If you even just look at the pictures in this room, you'll see the mechanics of how the image has been translated, it almost looks like 10 different painters."

At 30, Grose is one of those young people whose precocious articulacy secretly annoys you. The whole time you're listening to him talk about the roots of the unconscious and throwing around words like "micro-level" (he even uses the word "oscillation" a little later on, and so casually, too) you're trying to recall whether you were as intellectually fluent as this when you were 30.

Mark-making, Grose tells me, are those bits on a painting where you can see "evidence of a hand making a decision". Verbatim: "You can step back from the image and those seemingly counter-intuitive marks resolve into something quite solid."

And so I go up really close to a couple of Grose's paintings to see what he means. I think I spot such evidence of where a hand made a decision. A swah, a smear, that doesn't quite flow with the brushstroke current of the rest of the painting.

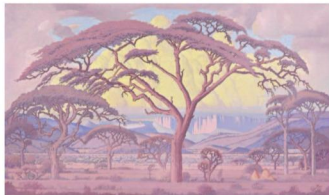
"Is that one there?" I go.

Yes. Yes it is.

For such a lean fellow, Grose has a remarkably deep voice. His speech is gradual and considered, too, so it's a little like listening to a voice on a dictaphone that has been slowed down a touch.

I look closer:
I spot a swab,
a smear, that
doesn't quite
flow with the
brushstroke
current of the
rest of the
painting

A SPACE FOR LANDSCAPE



JH Pierneef. Bushveld near Pletstroom, 1925, oil on canvas, South African Reserve Bank

THE WORK OF JH PIERNEEF

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Grose is intrigued by the physics, the actual science, of what happens when somebody looks at a painting. There are, of course, deep processes involved. Perspective. Present mood. The viewer's own subconscious — his or her entire being from womb to the moment he or she stands in front of the picture — being projected onto an apparently static image that is not static at all. Because one painting can be looked at by millions of people, and not be the same painting for a single one of them.

"I think, as a painter, I have to deal with the realities of the medium. You're quite manually making depth on a surface in a way that, unlike photography, the surface is a lot more of a thing; it's sort of asserted as a reality and the tension of the two realities of you looking at a flat thing and looking at a pictorial space, that tension is where I feel... that's where a lot of my enjoyment of painting comes from."

Note 1: Since this interview I've been trying to slip the word "oscillate" into informal conversation but have sadly yet to achieve this.

Note 2: A few days after the interview Grose sent me an e-mail saying: "I just wanted to say thanks for the chat the other day. I think you managed to draw some things out of me which I usually struggle to articulate. I feel like I managed to communicate something of my concerns and intentions — which is an exception to the rule."

This made me feel much better. **LS**

● **Ian Grose: Refrain is on at Stevenson gallery in Johurg until July 31.**



DOUBLE VISION: Ian Grose at the Stevenson Gallery with some of his art

Picture: WALDO SIEGERS