

## Lydia Stonehouse: Taking Her Body With Her

Organ Projects is pleased to present a solo exhibition of the work of visual artist Lydia Stonehouse. With a painting practice driven and contextualised by research into disconnection, mind-body dualism, phenomenology and the effect of the digital age on our capacity for embodied and relational connection, Stonehouse investigates these things through a process-driven approach of excavating and layering. Allowing a history of marks to gather and uncover forms once hidden under the surface, she offers an X-ray-like lens through which abstracted figuration is exposed, slicing through a moment as the internal is made visible.

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*Taking her body with her* takes its title from a misquote of poet and philosopher Paul Valéry's notion that, "*The painter takes his body with him*". Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his essay *Eye and Mind*, draws upon Valéry's insight to suggest that painting represents the experience of seeing the world in a more innate and immersive way. He goes on to add "*we must go back to the working, actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement*"

The works in this exhibition interweave and move between layers of the visible and the unseen. Bringing to light the interconnectedness of all things, this body of work is characterised by Stonehouse's use of line as a way to uncover this. Through evocative marks, carbon print and scratched channels, envisaged forms that would otherwise be un-traceable become perceivable within fields of colour. These lines not only tether depicted bodies to each other, but to their surroundings, such as in the painting *Lotus Birth* whose title references the birth practice in which a newborn baby's umbilical cord remains uncut and the placenta attached for ten-days after birth. In this work we see a human form with suggestions of internal organs outlined in a way that feels diagrammatical, as if highlighting certain parts' functions. A collection of scratchy black marks joins the body crouching over the ground from its navel into the pink mass it kneels upon –reminiscent of the umbilical cord, a lifeline and first point of connection between mother and child. Here this cord is the connector of body to earth, drawing a parallel between the essential connection of mother and child with that of humans to the earth.

The paintings *An ongoing birth*, *Not even trying*, and *Church State* share in this connection to the landscape, something that Stonehouse rarely *chooses* to feature in her work yet often appears at some point within the painting process. Usually through a dividing of space in which horizons come into being, the bodies in Stonehouse's work become situated within something vaster than themselves. Sometimes from an aerial view, such as in *Not even trying*, cross-roads and fields appear to pass through the body as if joining with the land bringing greater perspective and scale.

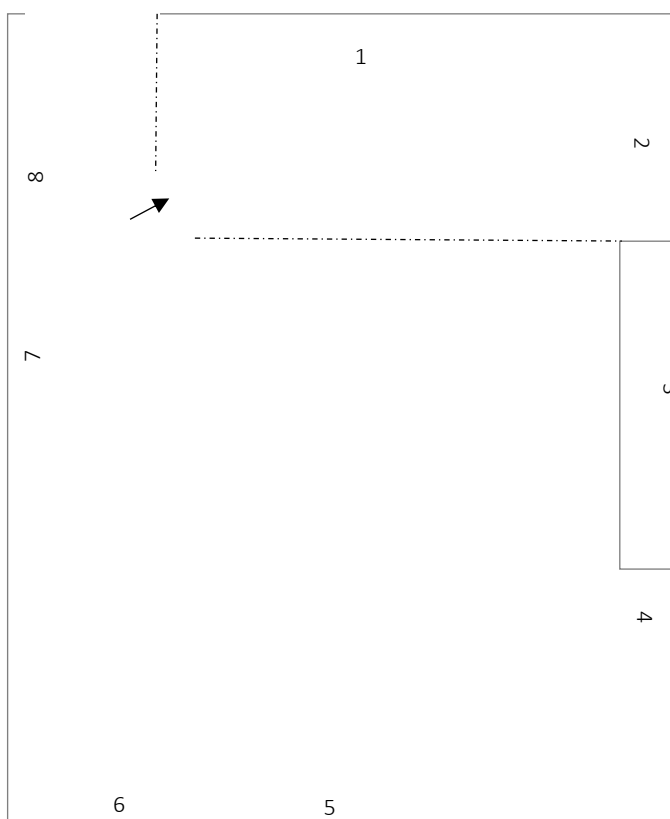
These lines connecting land and the wider world with the body points to Stonehouse's interest in a non-dualistic perspective and a decentering of the human, instead suggesting an existence within a wider network – an interdependence between land

and bodies. Originating from Stonehouse's drawing practice, these marks are first formed when making pencil drawings both inside and out of the studio. Envisaging the transfer of energy between bodies, she draws these skeletal maps that appear to trace the transferring of everything from gravitational forces, weather patterns and body heat, to pressure, care or electricity. Abstracting reality in this way allows for the internal to be made visible.

Made in her church attic studio, this body of work also draws on the context of her workspace, along with wider influences of the faith tradition she grew up in. The illuminated paintings echo a stained-glass window, a feature in Stonehouse's own studio. These backlit paintings set aside in the blacked-out space creates an environment which suggest a side chapel, a place for a moment of contemplation, reflection, or even the vulnerable act of confession. The works *Not even trying* and *An ongoing birth* present us with forms that again suggest internal organs, with one particularly defined that looks somewhat like a kidney or fetus. These open views of what could be a uterus or more broadly the inside of a body carry a sense of exposure and when lit from behind bears resemblance to a radiograph – a scan searching for answers. The way that the paint is layered as to embed previous marks beneath the surface when lit from behind uncovers them once more, exposing the painting process and revealing concealed marks. This all-seeing aspect of Stonehouse's work invites us to reflect, looking within and through to things we wouldn't usually see – either for being veiled in skin, being private in their usual occurrence, or deliberately hidden.

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Lydia Stonehouse (b. Cambridge) currently lives and works in Brighton, having received her BA in Fine Art Painting at The University of Brighton (2019- 2022). She was the receiver of the Cass Art X Phoenix Art Space Studio award 2022 and is the founder of Organ Projects, a curatorial project and space located within a church.



1. *Church state*, 2024, Oil and carbon print on canvas, 21 x 26cm
2. *Not even trying*, 2024, Oil on canvas, 117 x 127cm
3. *An ongoing birth*, 2024, Oil on canvas, 117 x 127cm
4. *Lotus birth*, 2024, Oil and carbon print on canvas, 26 x 21cm
5. *Arrangements*, 2024, Oil on canvas, 97 x 107cm
6. *Stitches*, 2024, Oil and carbon print on canvas, 26 x 21cm
7. *Book scan*, 2024, Oil and coloured crayon on canvas, 35.5 x 51cm
8. *Nip*, 2024, Oil on canvas, 25.5 x 21cm



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