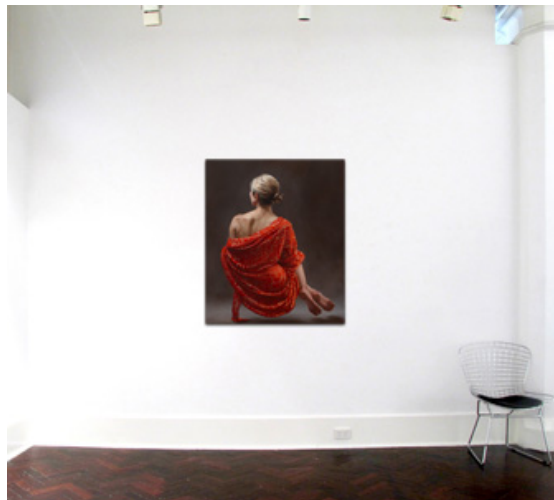


CLAIRE BRIDGE
ALCHEMY

16 July - 3 August 2013



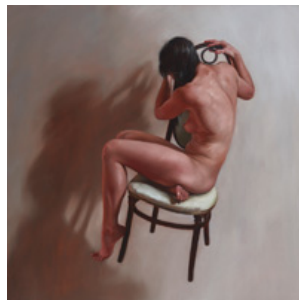
Alchemy 2013
oil on linen
123 x 104cm



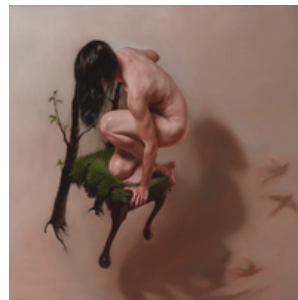
Artwork in situ on 3.7m wall



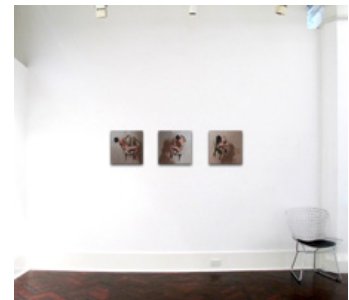
Rise 2013
oil on linen
40 x 40cm



Fall 2013
oil on linen
40 x 40cm



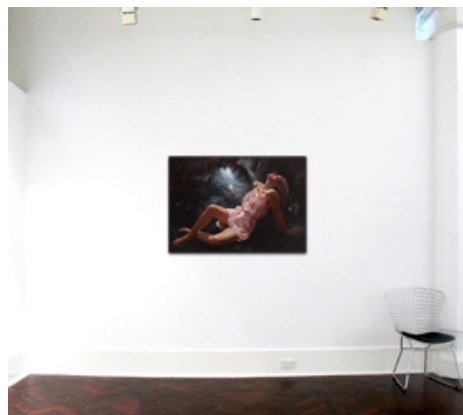
Winds of Change 2013
oil on linen
40 x 40cm



Artworks in situ on 3.7m wall



We are made of stars 2013
oil on linen
86 x 123cm



Artwork in situ on 3.7m wall



Touching Infinity 2013
oil on linen
86 x 123cm



Artwork in situ on 3.7m wall



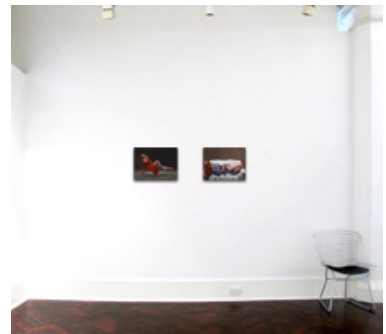
In dreams awake 2013
oil on linen
77x 95.5cm



Eye of the needle 2013
oil on linen
36 x 48cm



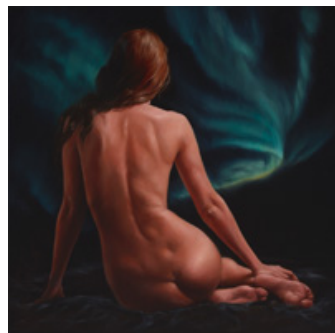
In my dreams you are real 2013
oil on linen
36 x 48cm



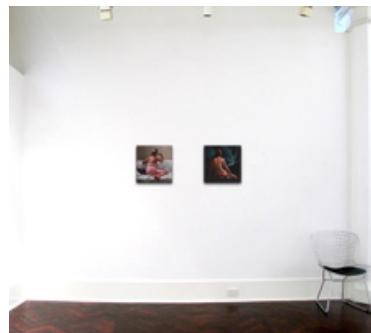
Artworks in situ on 3.7m wall



Of here and there 2013
oil on linen
40 x 40cm



This Velvet Night 2013
oil on linen
40 x 40cm



Artworks in situ on 3.7m wall

ALCHEMY

Inhale. Exhale. Release into the soft pose of a body at rest. Feel the deep stillness, partway between the hollow tranquillity of sleep and the ascent of awareness. The self in a state of spaciousness, free of any tension. A moment suspended, invented, bound together within the glassy surface of the canvas. A fine sliver of imagined, immaterial space has been inserted into Claire Bridge's classically representational paintings. An airy void serves to cushion the body, allowing it to hover, liberated from natural forces. Floating, these weightless bodies do not seem strange or unsettling. The slip of air upon which they rest shimmers with abstract possibility, transforming the mundane and everyday.

Intersecting figuration with the depiction of the ethereal, Bridge destabilises any literal reading of the human form, offering in its place a threshold site between the physical and the metaphysical. Portraiture becomes allegory. The body, no longer bound by the laws of gravity, stirs with a new kind of inner life.

To contemplate lightness – spiritual, corporeal, mythical or scientific – recalls humanity's desire for some celestial experience, the chance to move beyond the material plane, to lose our sense of self-hood. Physicists probe the structure of the atom to understand the greater universal whole, Buddhists search the workings of the mind to find that still point within. Ancient cultures looked to the stars for a companion to their earthly experiences. Within art history, the nimble bodies of nymphs, graces and gods, light-footed in their ascent above the weight of humanity, inspired the common man to emulate their perfection. Observe the toes of Botticelli's three Grace's as they lightly touch the ground. They too are in a threshold state, neither of earth or heaven.

The inclusion of the paranormal forces that act upon Bridge's floating figures appear normal, easy, effortless within the high realism and technical accuracy of her brushwork. Satin surfaces capture the tangible truth of her subjects. Skin, garments and hair, each is represented with a delicacy of touch. They possess volume and solidity and yet are also spacious, uplifted. A sparsity of detail has been used to represent the abstract spaces they inhabit. Light and shade, the drop of fabric, the transparency of air – each enable a focus to remain on the miraculous body, the remarkable, serene moment.

The miraculous merging of the material and immaterial suggests that matter is mutable. To glimpse the extraordinary, to break free from the restrictions of materiality is an idea that has inspired scientific and pre-scientific investigation for centuries. The Alchemists of the 17th century to surpass the mundane by eliciting a higher knowledge through the manipulation of minerals. The substances of the earth, rock, water, air were melded together in the hope of transforming base materials into precious metals, to find the secret of eternal youth. The esoteric has been superseded by 21st century rigour. Matter, today probed and theorised at the atomic level, is both a particle and a wave simultaneously – a superposition of two states, coalescing only under the act of observation. While no longer appealing to the magical, the universe we inhabit, its laws and capabilities still remain wondrous.

Delving into the transcendent presents an opportunity to imagine the ethereal, to feel lightness, to meditate on the link between mind and body. Perhaps not dissimilar to the aspirations of alchemists, these works represent a hope for an evolving consciousness, a new awareness of the interconnected nature of all things.

Phe Luxford 2013