MARTIN FINNIN
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John Martin Gallery

Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin

A Berlin Winter | Martin Finnin

I am a big sucker for spy novels. I have always thought travelling on the Munich underground was reminiscent of a le Carré novel. Well, hanging out in Berlin felt like walking from one thriller to the next. A couple of years ago I spent New Years with friends in Berlin. That was my first time visiting. There were so many completely unrelated realities humming alongside each other, I just couldn't wait to spend some time there. You see bullet holes in the walls, beautifully run down 19th-century houses and, of course, graffiti everywhere, all encircled by spy era trams that seemed to travel in the air, reminding me of car chases from my favourite 70's movies. It was a feast of images, some days it was hard to take it all in.

I didn't have a studio when I arrived in Berlin last summer. Most advertisements for artist studios didn't want oil painters, so I waited impatiently, walking around the city taking photos, making tiny paper-mache sculptures, drawing or just watching people. I soaked up as much of the museums as I could. It's not every day you get to sit in front of a Rembrandt, Rubens, Giacometti or late Picasso painting and head straight from there to the studio. The Pergamon museum houses one of the most significant collections of Islamic carpets in the world, and while I never much thought about carpets before, it quickly became one of my go-to places. The history of the collection was mind-blowing, never mind the carpets themselves. By the time I got a studio in October and began painting I was bursting at the seams.

Winter was settling in and the grey mixed with the Soviet era buildings, especially around the area where my studio was, felt oppressive and electrifying at the same time. Most people warned me of the winter in Berlin and a wind the locals call 'Siberian Whip', but I loved it. Berlin's winter sky is unlike anything I have felt before. In Ireland, that grey winter sky feels like a low ceiling, but in Berlin, it felt like a giant grey dome.

Grey can be a shy or stern friend to colour. Sometimes it withdraws from colour, other times it dominates it. I've always responded to a grey environment by using oranges, reds, yellows or pinks. It's an instinctive reaction. In Ireland, I do this mainly to warm myself up. In Berlin, the grey, urban surfaces were asking questions, and so in these works, the colour wasn't heating me but talking with them.

My studio in Berlin was in a building that used to be an old Stasi hotel for dignitaries. It was untouched since the seventies with all original features, from the flowery wallpaper to the dodgy elevator. My spot was on the 5th floor, and it couldn't have been more different from my studio in Ireland. It was like a warm concrete tree house. I felt like my head was firmly in the clouds. Not surprisingly, I began to look at clouds closely, probably for the first time in my life. They move at a different pace to the bustling city below. One day I saw them slowly toppling over the edge of a building, like shaving foam. From my window I also watched countless aeroplanes starting to make their descent towards the city and Tegel airport. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that my time in this studio has changed my view of the world in many ways.

An average day in Berlin was to get up early and have a toast and coffee at the same place, toss a coin for which of the many museums to explore and then head to the studio, or sometimes the other way around. It usually depended on the light. Whenever I had to avoid the studio altogether because the paintings were slowly stewing, I ended up happily stuck in a window somewhere watching, writing and drawing.

The streets of Berlin are lined with boxes where people leave stuff they no longer need, mainly books, lots of them in English, clothes but also sofas and crazy stuff. It's a great public library if you have the chance to walk around as much as I did. I picked up this book and remembered this section where Georgia O'Keefe lists the five things she reckoned an artist should do, or have. The one that stood out: "An artist should be aware of their surroundings and use them". I agree with that statement. I see my surroundings in these works. While my work is considered abstract, I look at these Berlin Winter paintings and see clouds, aeroplanes, energy lines, 70's flower wallpaper taken from the studio hallway, Islamic rug patterns, trees, components of medieval battle scenes and fireworks, everything settling into its order. I'd like to think that the darkness is working hand in hand with colour.

Martin Finnin

Fifty Kilos of Eternal Blue, 2019
oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cms

Study of Medieval Armour, 2019
oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cms

A Fierce Blossoming Carry-On, 2019
oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cms

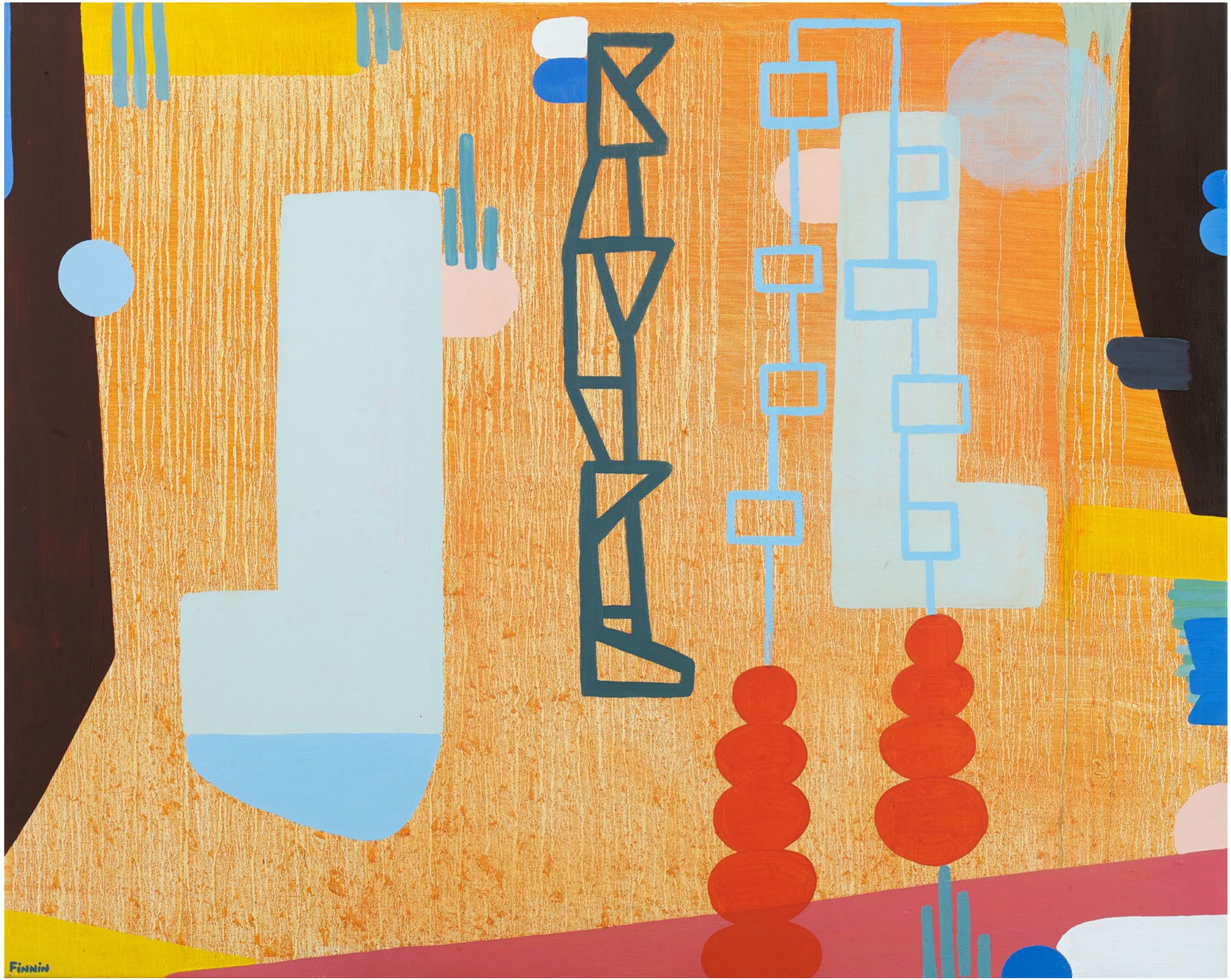
Berlin Shape with Toppling Cloud, 2019
oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cms

Berlin Wall, Bernauer Straße

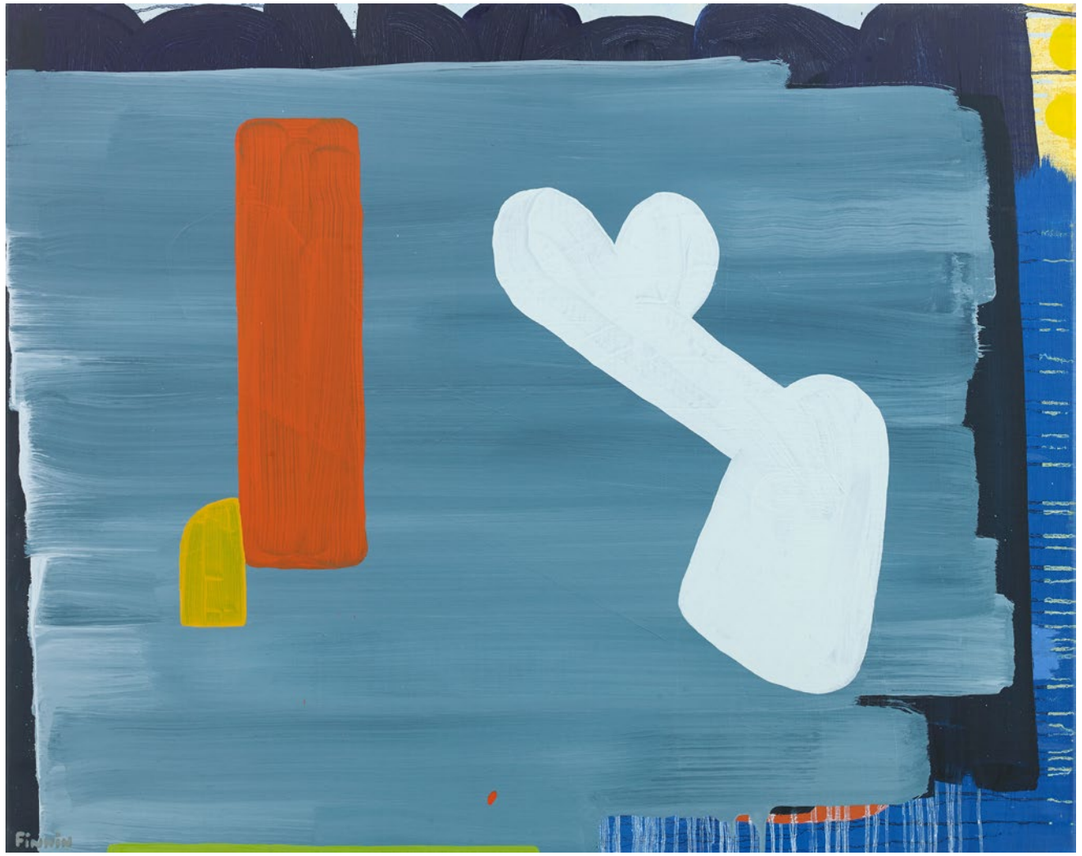
The Secrecy of 10,000 Tigers, 2019
oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cms

New Year's Eve Berlin (After Whistler), 2019
oil on canvas, 140 x 180 cms

Berlin Shape With Toppling Cloud and Italian Shadow, 2019
oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cms



Berlin - Dreams of Balconia With Italian Shadow, 2019
oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cms



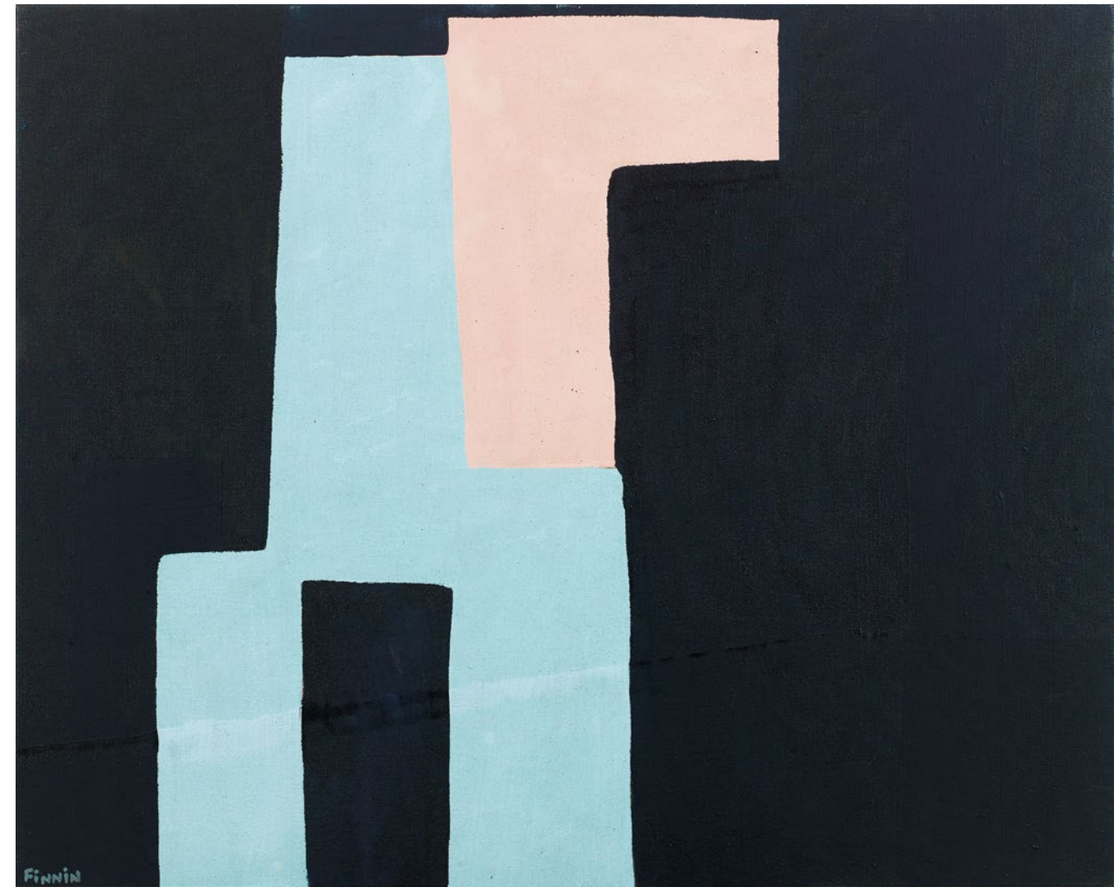
Cropped Tree With Red Building and Orange Shadow - Berlin Winter, 2019
oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cms

Berlin Studio

Study of Medieval Battle Scene, 2019
oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cms

Alexanderplatz Berlin, 2019
oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cms

Studio Visitor, 2019
oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cms

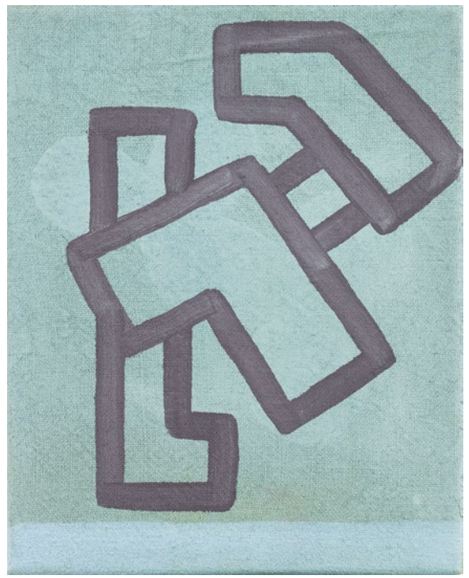


A Long Vacated Shadow, 2019
oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cms

A Route to Paradise, 2018
oil on canvas, 140 x 180 cms

Martin Finnin, Berlin Studio

A Second Set of Wings , 2019
oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cms



Dismantling of Concrete Structure, 2019
oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cms

Amoebas in Cahoots, 2019
oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cms

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