



TOM ALLEN

AIR DE PARIS

TOM ALLEN

Born in 1975, Springfield, United States

Lives and works in Los Angeles, United States

Intricate and intensely chromatic, the floral paintings of Tom Allen are based on his own photographs, records of his direct experience of plants in situ. Distinct from the post-mortem display of still-life, or the passive features of pastoral fancy, his subjects are vital and knowing, holding court in environments humming with artifice.

Employing small-scale canvases, highly choreographed compositions and meticulous technique, Allen's work shivers with a visceral synesthesia of concentrated color, movement and space. In these pictures, being and looking fuse, mood and surface coalesce, animating images that look right back at you, fierce and resolute.

A selection of recent solo exhibitions includes *Personae*, Air de Paris, Romainville, 2025; *The Song*, Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles, 2021; *The Promise*, the Approach, London, 2021; *Praeternatura*, Air de Paris, Paris, 2020; *La-Bas*, Lulu, Mexico City, 2019; and *The Lovers*, Bel Ami, Los Angeles, 2017. Recent group exhibitions include *Particularities*, X Museum, Beijing, 2021; *Blue Flowers*, Le Maximum, Venice, CA, 2019; *Symbolisms*, Cooper Cole, Toronto; *Ruins in the Snow*, High Art, Paris 2017; and *A Change of Heart*, Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles, 2016.

His work can be found in the permanent collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Sweeney Gallery at the University of California, Riverside, and in numerous private collections.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Personæ

Air de Paris, Romainville, France

12.01.2025 — 01.03.2025

Persona—the outer limits of self, hung on as mask, a bit of artifice. In the paintings of Tom Allen, a mysterious, ineffable plentitude emerges from the folds of promissory surfaces, projections of the masked, and the saturated effects, intensities of light and colour, which animate the strange surfeit as a kind of subject. Cloven and concealed, yet inexhaustibly present, are conformations and complexions that tell of a concealed presence, still invisible, yet surely there, as a possible threat, or lure, cached in high contrast and prodigious detail. Allen's recent paintings, namely, are drawn out of, and into, the complex double movements of the titular 'personæ'—the scorpion and the bull, opposing signs courted from across distant asterisms and tropical lines; twin orchids, spotted with unseeing eyes, open wide; the sorrow-chasing nepenthes, 'quieting all pain and strife'; and, more enigmatic, the withdrawn masquerade of faces in low relief, weaving together the organic and inorganic, like a delicate filigree, spinning concepts of alterity, attraction, and transmutation into the work's surface.

Maurice Blanchot: "For the edges of a secret are more secret than the secret itself."¹ Here, as elsewhere in Allen's oeuvre, things shift in gemlike perspectives, glittering and glowing, grotesquely transposed, vibrant, virile, and ablaze. The edges of subjects flow and curve and spiral to near-imperceptibly incorporate; this undoing of contour reveals the attractive influence that forces contradictory forms to coalesce. Out of the dispersal, dissimulation, and breaking of Allen's imposing personæ, the tactile trespass of twinned forms, one into the other, the paintings point to the tropical element in all creation.

"Night is the winter of the tropics," as the common saying goes. "Tropic is the shadow from which all realistic discourse flees," confirms Hayden White. The night, the shadow, too, as personæ—guise, veil, cover, hailing the mask's etymological origins as specter, nightmare. Allen's vivid life forms, precious stones, like Charon's eyes ablaze, hail both passion and horror, life and decay. The mask protects, but also projects; it conceals, and wards off. After all, it is common to speak of masks as protective, "covering to hide or guard the face"; that is, as a defensive phenomenon of uncertain origins, which belongs to the realms of the eternally vigilant—the contingency of the 'qui vive?', those wide awake, and yet solicitous, theatrical. Here too, the masks' projected personæ stage a doubling, played out as a transformative influence, which motions surfaces to forge contact—as language. Allen's strategic masks, then, serve the operative function of making a withdrawn interiority—desire, bane, poison, potential—emerge through an expressive valence projected at surface.

Unfixed from their proper place in the firmament, the signaling personæ, such as the scorpion and the bull, come forth from other disciplines of thought to govern the painterly field. There, conflicts, contradictions, and correspondences fold into ornate density. The unnamable complexity of the mask, as carapace or armor, theatrical guise or ornamental surface, libidinal current or force of death, exaggerates some essential condition, a concealed interiority—desire, bane, poison, potential—to the point of feverish contradiction.

(...) Intertwining astrological, aesthetic, and formal elements, Allen's personæ menace an affective, experiential space—forever filling with potential, precious life, in relation with its inevitable destructiveness. — Sabrina Tarasoff



Exhibition views

Personæ

Air de Paris, Romainville, France

2025

Photo : © Anna Denisova



Exhibition views

Personæ

Air de Paris, Romainville, France

2025

Photo : © Anna Denisova

Tom Allen
Air de Paris, Romainville, France
28.11.2020 — 30.01.2021

Tom Allen has a singular, if unusual relationship with nature. More chthonic than Arcadian, the so-called natural world he depicts in his paintings is in fact anything but natural. Indeed, if what he does could be considered an idealization of nature, then it is an idealization that goes the wrong way, to the point of excess, of perversion. The infernal flora that populate his paintings seem to not only preclude any kind of return to Eden, but more importantly, betoken a toxic landscape that is probably not even fit for human existence. What he makes doesn't even seem made for the human eye; as vibrantly colored as they are super saturated with information, they might be mutations meant for a more evolved optical capacity. This general quality of excess has deep roots in fin-de-siècle France, or the French decadents, specifically in the work of Édouard Vuillard and Gustave Moreau, the novels of J.K. Huysmans, as well as the Art Nouveau objects of Louis Comfort Tiffany and René Lalique. Synthesized with his long standing interest in mysticism and love of Heavy Metal, this frame of reference informs the crucible from which he produces his unique and preternatural vision of the world.

The six floral portraits presented in his show at Air de Paris were painstakingly crafted, often times with surgical precision, over the course of the last year. They see him pushing his medium to new, hallucinatory limits. From his black iris on orange paisley ground in VI to his fantastical rose and canna lily, the sheer density of information achieves new heights of retinal opulence. Meanwhile, the pair of double orchids, which represent day and night and which contain over fifty colors, could be seen as the twin poles around which this manifestation of Allen's universes revolves and visually explodes.

— Chris Sharp



Exhibition views
Tom Allen
Air de Paris, Romainville, France
2020-2021
Photo : © Marc Damage



Exhibition views

Tom Allen

Air de Paris, Romainville, France

2020-2021

Photo : © Marc Damage

Là-bas

Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico

06.07 — 17.08.2019

Tom Allen makes figurative paintings of an unusually excessive nature. For the nature, so to speak, that he depicts is thoroughly and completely excessive, to the point of being unnatural. Drawing upon French fin-de-siècle painting and literature, such as Édouard Vuillard and Gustave Moreau, the novels of J.K. Huysmans, as well as the Art Nouveau objects of Louis Comfort Tiffany and René Lalique, Allen synthesizes this frame of reference with everything from the hallucinatory iconography of post 60s counter-culture to an interest in mysticism and Death Metal, all to optically harrowing effect. As carefully crafted as they are saturated with botanical nuance, Allen's generally small-scale paintings are the byproduct of a maniacal inquiry into color, form and space. They demonstrate an uncanny skill on par with that of Flemish still life masters or, say, Chardin, while nevertheless testifying to the pictorial invention of whole complex worlds. In this work, as per historical symbolism, nature assumes a thoroughly artificial revision. Infernal, magnificent, and presumably toxic, it, nature, is, if not idealized, then fetishized, the way, say, horror movies might fetishize the night. Finally, the explosive, otherworldly atmospheres and textures described in his pictures seem to be inhabitable only in dreams, nightmares or fantasy.

For his exhibition at Lulu, Allen will present a suite of six new flower paintings. All painted in the last year, they represent a new level of commitment, detail and quality in the artist's work. It's as if he has gone even deeper into the universe he has created, plunging further into its chthonic depths. In *Mirrors (South of Heaven)*, 2019, a pair of livid pink orchids floats in front of lavishly patterned space, while in *Passiflora*, 2018, a furious red passionflower, and its densely interwoven surroundings, pulsate with internal bursts of light.



Exhibition views
Là-bas
Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico
2019



Exhibition views
Là-bas
Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico
2019

SELECTED ARTWORKS



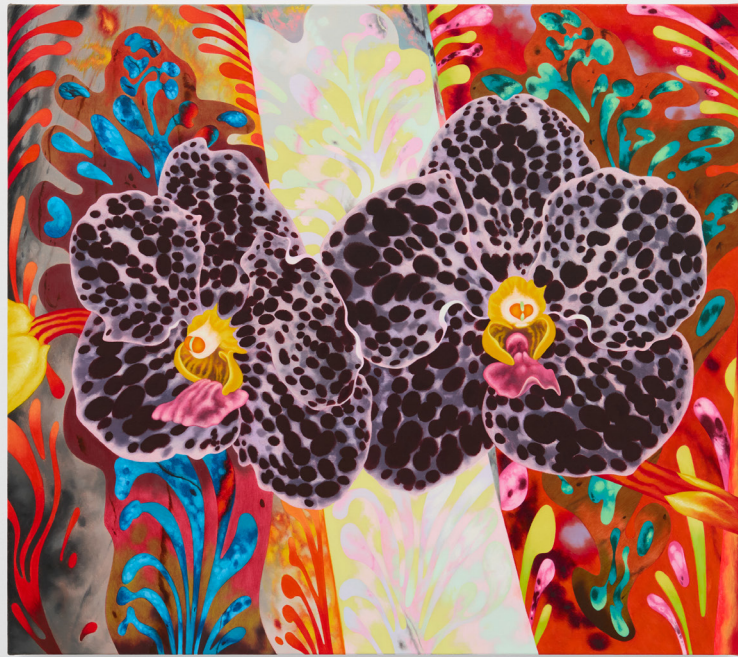
Untitled (the Fold)
2025
Oil on canvas
43,18 x 58,42 cm
Unique



Grotesques
2024
Oil on canvas
58,5 x 43,5 cm
Unique



Yesterday's Twilights
2024
Oil on canvas
38,5 x 33 cm
Unique



Untitled (the Break)
2024
Oil on canvas
56 x 63,5 cm
Unique



Crimson and Violet
2024
Oil on canvas
71,3 x 63,5 cm
Unique



Red and Gold
2024
Oil on canvas
71,3 x 63,5 cm
Unique



Dark Edges
2023
Oil on canvas
58,5 x 43,2 x 4 cm
Unique



Vermilion, Silver, Blue
2022
Oil on canvas
33 x 28 cm
Unique



The Day
2020
Oil on canvas
33 x 28 cm
Unique



IV
2020
Oil on cnvas
43,2 x 43,2 cm
Unique



VII
2020
Oil on canvas
45,7 x 35,6 cm
Unique



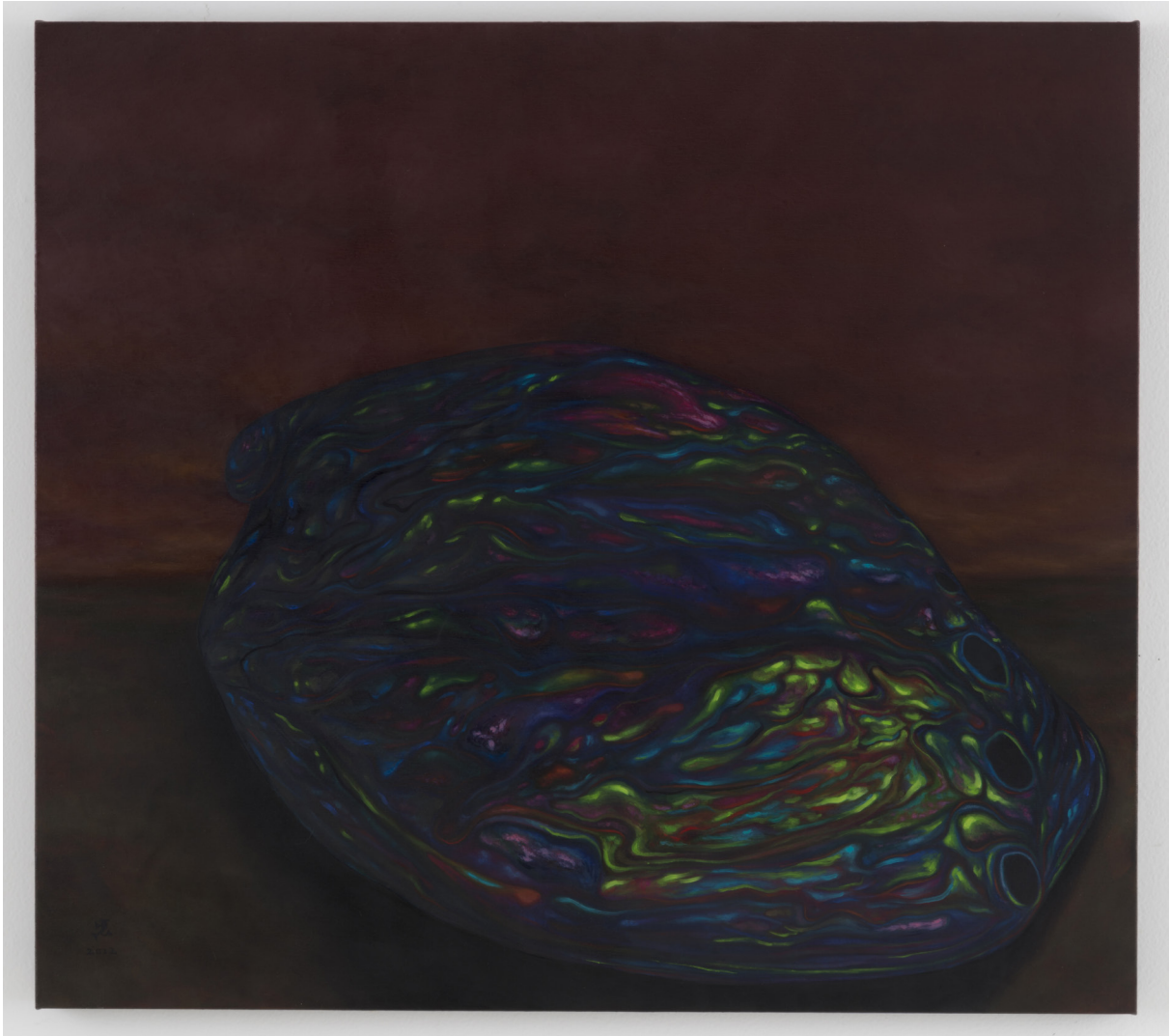
Serpentine Night
2020
Oil on canvas
71,1 x 58,4 cm
Unique



Red and Black
2020
Oil on canvas
71,1 x 58,4 cm
Unique



Red and Black
2020
Oil on cnvas
94 x 55,9 cm
Unique



Polished Shell
2012
Oil on canvas
66 x 74 cm
Unique