

Is it still possible to embrace the pursuit of progress when it has become difficult to trust in its promises?

In *Tools for Dreamers*, Ben Edmunds draws on the visual languages of sailing, climbing and other adventure sports to explore a pursuit that has shaped artistic and cultural production for more than a century. Large gradient paintings evoke a sense of the sublime, while webbing, buckles, ropes and carbon fibre structures suggest systems built for forward motion, exploration and a destination that always remains ahead.

This unabashed language of pursuit sits uneasily within a contemporary condition in which it is now met with increasing scepticism, despite its persistence across the twentieth century. Across early Modernism, it was tied to the idea that new forms could participate in the construction of a better future. It was both a belief and a framework through which artistic production was understood. While it has been proclaimed and ascribed to artists for over a century, it now reads differently.

Within the Modernist movements, new artistic forms broke with inherited traditions and were tied to the idea that art could participate in shaping a better future. Often articulated through manifestos, these movements set out principles directed toward utopian visions, even amid industrialisation, political instability and war. Bauhaus in Germany collapsed distinctions between art, design and everyday life, aligning form with systems of modern living. Futurism in Italy, announced through manifesto, glorified speed, the machine and rupture, rejecting the past in favour of acceleration and transformation.

The pursuit of a better future through art did not stop after Modernism. Four decades later, this emphasis on forward projection reappeared in post-war American painting. Abstract Expressionism in the United States positioned abstract painting as an act of individual freedom. Within what came to be known as the Action Painters, Jackson Pollock turned the canvas into a site of physical engagement. Risk, gesture and presence framed the artist as a figure of autonomy, and painting as an expression of immediacy and freedom.

Alongside this, Colour Field painting developed within the broader context of Abstract Expressionism, shifting attention from gesture toward scale, surface and perception. Barnett Newman described painting as an encounter with the sublime, where colour operates as an immersive field of experience. These concerns reappear in Edmunds' work, where large gradient paintings form the focal point of the exhibition and evoke the sublime through expansive fields of colour. The image is not only seen but experienced, as shifting gradients produce a perceptual movement that extends beyond the material surface.

Around these works, the visual language of adventure sports becomes visible. Webbing, buckles, ropes and carbon fibre structures frame and support the paintings, redirecting the logic of the sublime toward systems of tension, support and ascent. Looking is shaped through effort, orientation and reach, rather than passive perception.

The artist, the explorer, the athlete, the brand strategist. Figures that persist across contemporary culture, each oriented toward a horizon that remains out of reach. The titles of

Edmunds' works occupy a similarly unsettled space. *We Trust It With Tomorrow*. *Freedom Is for the Fearless*. *To the Furthest Edge*. *We Were Once Explorers Too*. They sit between manifesto and slogan, instruction and belief. They can be read as advertising language, motivational address, or sincere declaration, without settling into a single register.

In *We Were Once Explorers Too*, a floor-to-ceiling white powder coated aluminium structure holds a large canvas in tension. The system recalls industrial display and post-minimal construction, yet it does not simply support the work but becomes part of its language. The canvas shifts from teal to white to night-sky blue, built up through repeated layering of dye. What appears immediate is slow, controlled and labour-intensive. A carbon fibre stretcher frames the work, recalling systems of storage and transmission under pressure. What appears industrial is carefully made by hand, with printed text elements attached and wooden stretcher bars cut into the back. The work holds itself between surface and support.

In *Forever Never Ends (The Best Is Yet to Come)*, a clock functions without time, its hands moving together as a single line so that time is no longer measured but held in suspension. The phrase "Forever Never Ends" is set in sharp black on white, immediate and certain, while "The Best Is Yet to Come" sits on an off-white surface and requires closer attention. Certainty and hesitation occupy the same object.

We Carried Hope by Its Edges (Held Together by Almost Nothing), a wooden ladder is installed in the gallery, gloss painted white and placed against a white wall, so it risks being missed at first. It suggests ascent, but also instability. The title moves from hope toward fragility and doubt.

In *Freedom Is for the Fearless*, a large gradient painting is suspended from ceiling rigging. Moving from red to orange to pink, the composition recalls a sunset. Hung freely in space, the work reveals its stretcher bars at the back, exposed behind the image.

The final works form a pair. *We trust it with tomorrow 01* and *We trust it with tomorrow 02*. The smaller canvas is bleached white with hand stitching visible on its surface. The larger shifts from pale white into deep fog-blue night.

Futurism in Italy located this promise in speed and rupture, Abstract Expressionism in the United States in the heroic individual and the act of painting, and Colour Field painting in scale, perception and experience.

In Edmunds' work, this pursuit does not return as quotation but is reactivated through material systems and a language drawn from advertising, adventure sport and slogan as much as from art history. The works move between instruction, declaration and image, where text reads as both poetry and address, and where ideas of ascent, endurance and projection are embedded in structure and surface.

Presented in a contemporary context, this language of pursuit carries a different weight. It can be met with scepticism, yet it persists in circulation, suggesting that the desire for forward movement has not disappeared but has shifted form. What remains open is what pro-

gress now means, and what has interrupted its certainty. *Tools for Dreamers* holds these positions in suspension. It does not resolve them, but keeps them in play.