

*Better than expected, worse than I hoped*

The workings of memory are a strange thing. Despite shaping our perception of reality, memory does not reproduce moments as they happened. Instead, it is often heavily mediated, constantly edited and structured. We replay memories selectively, filling in the gaps with fabricated fragments. Reality slips and distorts to fit certain narratives. When can we trust our memories to be reliable narrators, when in truth they so often fail us?

No matter how obsessively we record our lives, memories refuse to remain in trusted passages. Lucy Neish has meticulously kept written records, photos, screenshots, and recordings for years. Despite this, parts inevitably get lost and replaced. It is when she recreates these records in her paintings and drawings that she encounters a slippage, and her grip on a “true” reality intentionally loosens. Through this translation, she engages with how the unreliable narrator of memory emerges and how we reshape recollection to fit a desired narrative.

The places Neish depicts, a low contrast cityscape in Tokyo, the leafy abstraction of the churchyard behind her home, a pool at dusk in the park at the top of the hill, and flowers on the studio communal bathroom window, form the cornerstones of her everyday life. By pinning down these locations, the paintings map the physical boundaries of her daily routine, marking spaces she inhabits and repeatedly encounters.

“I’m interested in micro looking: this sort of painstaking attention to something transient, paired with these larger, looser paintings of place,” she explains. Creating landscapes of places close to her, she returns to the churchyard behind her house or the park at the top of the hill. “In some ways, I yearn and fiend for a perfect memory,” she observes, “but I have to maintain a loose grip when translating it into painting.”

The paintings refract her experience of place and offer it to the viewer. She works in densely layered, low contrast compositions, rendered with an almost obsessive elaboration. This precision swims against the current of the rapid pace at which we consume images every day. Thousands pass before our eyes daily: scrolling on our phones, clicking on our laptops, watching

films on televisions, looking things up on tablets, glancing at WhatsApp groups. These images are disposable, used once and discarded, rarely to be seen again. In Neish's practice, images are not skimmed and discarded; instead, she revels in slow, prolonged, almost compulsive looking.

Still, discrepancies inevitably occur when an image is translated onto the canvas, and again when these specific moments in time and place are offered to the viewer. "Painting refracts my experience of places and hands them to the viewer," she notes. Deliberately intensifying these inconsistencies, images from the past are broken apart and reused in new and unsettling ways.

The largest painting in the exhibition, *St Giles*, is based on a photograph taken in the churchyard behind the artist's house. The composition of this large scale landscape is structured through broad planes of paint layered with loose, reaching gestures. The palette remains low in contrast, with subtle shifts in tone rather than sharply defined forms. Within the painting, the ground operates as the most stable plane, anchoring the composition, while the tree branches arc swirlingly toward the viewer, subtly enclosing the pictorial space.

*Ruskin Pool*, a considerably narrower format, is based on a snapshot taken during a summer walk home at dusk. Built up with similar planes of paint, its focal point is the water, which reflects the surrounding environment. Spanning from the upper left corner and widening toward the bottom, the reflections are the only element that begins to reveal what kind of place it might be. The composition is more contrasted than *St Giles*, with deep shadows in the corners and bright yellow highlights in the reflected water, adding visual intensity to the otherwise elusive scene.

*In View from APA*, Neish depicts another intimate scene, the view from her hotel room in Tokyo, where she worked for six months in 2025. Looking directly onto tall buildings, the painting is structured through a harmonious geometry, offering an expanse of urban space to the viewer. The scene feels at once hyper familiar and difficult to pin down. Cities are often associated with bright lights and sharp contrasts; here, however, the city appears almost organic or mountainous. Pinks, greens, and

maroons give way to subtle tonal shifts that bring the scene in and out of focus.

While *St Giles*, *Ruskin Pool*, and *View from APA* present landscapes and cityscapes as compressed views of larger spaces, another work reverses this sense of scale, depicting flowers upright and enlarged beyond life size. The composition is predominantly yellow, with the flowers rendered in greenish grey. The surface is heavily textured, and the sharply defined forms of the flowers stand out against the more uniform background. The flowers occupy most of the canvas from top to bottom, while generous space remains at the sides, framing the composition and emphasizing their verticality.

Extending Neish's interest in close observation, *Better than expected, worse than I hoped* also includes four small drawings of rabbits. Rendered in graphite with painstaking precision, these intimate works isolate the animals from any obvious context. At first glance, they could resemble traditional natural history illustrations or anatomical studies. The title of each drawing introduces a subtle jolt, revealing the unexpected origin of the image and shifting the viewer's understanding. The drawings explore the duality of time and attention: Neish spends hours rendering images that might otherwise have been glimpsed and forgotten in an instant.

Together, the works are autobiographical, almost diaristic. While they depict familiar moments, they also explore how details inevitably become lost in translation. The works suggest that even the closest attention cannot fully preserve a moment. The paintings act as unreliable narrators, embracing the slip-page inherent both in the moment itself and in the formation of its memory.