

Nick GOSS

Artreview,

Nick Goss Isle of Thanet

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Nick Goss *Isle of Thanet*
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The seed for Nick Goss's latest exhibition was planted when he learned that the Isle of Thanet – the coastal headland of Kent, Britain's southeasternmost county, accommodating the towns of Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate – really was an island once. Centuries before the mini-Bilbao effect triggered by the opening of Margate's Turner Contemporary gallery in 2011, the region was separated from the mainland by a strait. By the sixteenth century it had silted up, yet the Anglo-Dutch Goss was struck by the fact that residents still refer to their home as 'the isle'. The artist is drawn to places that, in his words, 'express a type of limbo': you can see why an island that exists as such in linguistic memory alone might have appealed to him.

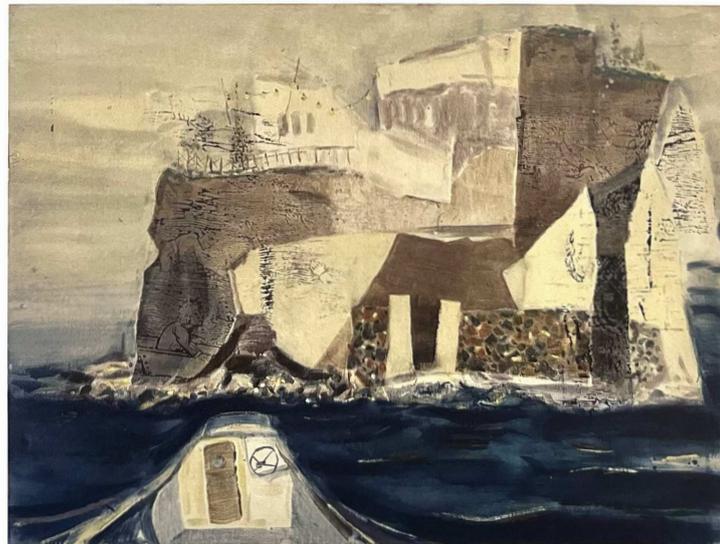
While there are allusions to the Thanet landscape in this body of work – a line of electricity pylons stretching out across a coastal vista in *Passengers* (all works 2024) and in titles such as *Walpole Bay* or *Madeira Walk* – it is less a literal articulation of place than a meditation on a state of insularity informed by historical memory. Consider *Bread and Puppet*, one of several works here to feature a recognisable

human presence. Goss conjures a tightly packed crowd from a jumble of arcs in maroon, yellow, blue and brown, two thirds of the canvas filled with a disco-fied homage to French modernist painter Robert Delaunay. In the middle distance, a bunting-draped stage is set with microphones and a stepladder: the context could be anything from a nineteenth-century political rally to a present-day street festival.

The blurring of past and present manifests itself more explicitly in terms of process, through Goss's signature technique of incorporating into his canvases screenprinted imagery from preexisting sources, in this case including eighteenth-century engravings and motifs from Dutch textile designs. *Newgate Gap*, for instance, presents us with three foregrounded bicycles, lined up against the kind of grubby arched racks typical of British towns. Above and behind, this view gives way to a cavelike central aperture bursting with depictions of lush foliage appropriated from one such Lowlands source: the screenprinted imagery plays on the imagined cliché of the 'desert island', contrasted by the sad strands of creeper dangling from the cave's mouth and

marking the boundary between the picture's division of the naturalistic and the fantastical.

What Goss really excels at, however, is the study of neglect: when he paints an interior, its plug sockets will be yellowing and its formica laminate surfaces peeling (*Sun Cafe*), or elsewhere, shelves full of half-empty liquor bottles fogged by dust and grime (*Old Dixie Down*). The rooms he tends to focus on have seemingly been vacated in a hurry: in the latte composition, depicting what might be the unpeopled dining room of a seafront café, he goes so far as to include a plate of hardboiled eggs split down the middle, abandoned and left to congeal. It's unclear whether the artist would agree, but you could reasonably read these paintings as articulations of a particularly British kind of nostalgia, one engendered by a perceived sense of national decline and made material in the condition of faded seaside resort towns such as those on Thanet. Goss has spoken about how, ideally, he would like his paintings to project a 'sound'; yet if his work is to be interpreted in synaesthetic terms, what they really give off is a smell – and it is ignorably musty. *Digby Warde-Aldam*



Walpole Bay, 2024, distemper, oil and silkscreen on linen, 150 × 200 cm.
Photo: Eva Herzog. Courtesy the artist and Perrotin, Paris