

Sophie Barber

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It's perhaps not fair to simply call Sophie Barber a painter. Yes, she paints, but there is so much more going on there. Looking at her work we are enticingly confronted with something more akin to gleaned fragments of a poetic memory than simply paintings as such. Living and working in Hastings in the southeast of England, Barber has spent the better part of the last decade recording her distilled observations—personal, social and historical—on an array of refreshingly playful and irregular canvases covered in thickly impastoed oils that shift suddenly in scale from the Lilliputian to the Brobdingnagian. Each painting includes a rough if charmingly painted vignette—a vase of flowers, a visual reference to an admired artist, a personal reference to a landscape or place—alongside a short, hand painted text that grounds the image in the artist's own poetic present. Past works have featured the artist's recurring motif of a vase of flowers lovingly surrounded by achingly heartfelt texts such as “last night Renoir saved my life from a broken heart” on small, almost sculpturally bulbous canvases stuffed from behind with remnants of other paintings. In other larger works a toucan sits on a bird feeder with the painted words “WOLFGANG LOVES TO LOVE BIRDS” sewn to the bottom of a large unstretched canvas which is itself simply nailed to the wall while a vase of sunflowers hovers in a pale blue field over the words “IN THE AIR TONIGHT.” Whether evoking a personal connection to the work of August Renoir, the photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, or a particular feeling of a moment in time, each of Barber's paintings creates a fragment of a story, a trigger of a memory, and a barometric reading of the emotional mood of a particular place and time. Taken together, Barber's uniquely personal combination of image and text answers an important question: how do you write an autobiography as a piece of painterly concrete poetry?

For her presentation at MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Barber has focused her poetic painterly attention on the idea of connection and how everyday objects can stand in for the gravitational pull that love generates between two people. In *Let's Stay Together* (2025), a pair of giant flame red cherries hang together on a three meter long unstretched canvas that drapes onto the floor. The cherries, still connected by their stems, cast painted shadows on the

canvas as it sits on the floor while an all-uppercase text emphatically implores “LET'S STAY TOGETHER.” There is a wonderful confluence in this work between gravity physically pulling this canvas to the floor and the metaphorical grace of the heartwarming attraction between these two connected entities. As with all of Barber's work, her playful irreverence for the sanctified aura of the stretched canvas is perfectly aligned with her embrace of the fragile and always provisional character of human relationships. In another work, *Together again forever at last* (2024), two snails inch their way across the small-scaled, over-stuffed and roughly stretched canvas sandwiched between a hand painted version of its title. Past, present and future are all evoked in this work as two entities' paths diverge, converge and move forward into a warmly anticipated future. Elsewhere in Barber's paintings, diverse objects become anthropomorphic characters on the stage of a still life as in the work *It's Me & You* (2025) in which the artist references a work by David Hockney in which a bottle of Evian water and a vase of flowers come together to form an odd couple who might be lovers or friends. The observational yet highly personal searching in Barber's work—the artist's own searching and the universal longing for connection that she poetically invokes—speaks to the artist's empathetic concern with being (together) in the world. The two haystacks in Barber's diminutive *Two Needles in Monets Haystack* (2025) say it all. Riffing on Monet's almost compulsively repeated depiction of haystacks in his beloved Giverny which allowed the artist to depict changes in atmosphere, mood, light and time, Barber alludes to being lost and then found. In her case, finding two needles in two haystacks becomes the equivalent of an open-ended love letter to the act of being and belonging, conversing and comingling. Past, present and future collapse in her works as relationships change and evolve through moments of melancholy and elation. Indeed, as she's written in her own painterly poetics: “together again forever at last.”

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Sophie Barber (b. 1996) lives and works in Hastings, U.K. Her paintings have been featured in solo exhibitions in Los Angeles (Chris Sharp Gallery) and London (Alison Jacques Gallery and Goldsmiths CCA) and her survey exhibition *Mackerel sky, mackerel sky, never long wet, never long dry* is currently on view through March 15, 2026 at Hastings Contemporary in Hastings, U.K.

Douglas Fogle

Douglas Fogle (b. 1964) is a curator and writer based in Los Angeles. Fogle has nearly thirty years of experience as a museum curator focusing on exhibitions and publications devoted to contemporary art, film, architecture, fashion, and design. He recently curated the traveling retrospective *Thomas Demand: The Stutter of History* and his exhibition *Marlene Dumas: Cycladic Blues* is on view at the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens in through December 2025.