

An abstract painting by Christina Kimeze, featuring a dense composition of vertical and diagonal brushstrokes in vibrant colors including purple, yellow, green, and orange. The background is a mix of these colors, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. In the lower right quadrant, there is a more defined, though still somewhat abstract, face rendered in shades of purple and green, looking towards the right. The overall texture is very expressive and layered.

CHRISTINA KIMEZE: BETWEEN WOOD AND WHEEL

31 January – 11 May 2025
Main Gallery & Fire Station

Exhibition guide

SLG

CHRISTINA KIMEZE: BETWEEN WOOD AND WHEEL

31 JAN - 11 MAY 2025

Between Wood and Wheel is the first solo exhibition in the UK by London-based artist, Christina Kimeze. Her paintings depict ungraspable, in-between spaces and, in the artist's words, 'the idea of existing between two emotional spaces and the feelings of "otherness" that can arise from this space'.

Kimeze's paintings evoke images in the mind's eye and the shifting nature of our relationship to our inner lives. Landscapes and interiors create a sense of mood rather than describing specific places. Shadowy female figures are based on the artist, her friends and family, but they could also be images of ourselves or others from our dreams, or ciphers for humankind. Richly coloured foliage is often inspired by Kimeze's memories of visiting her father's home country of Uganda, but is sufficiently abstract to allow space for our own interpretations. Perspective is skewed to further disrupt the usual order of things, turning us inwards to reflect on our internal visualisation of thoughts, feelings and memories. Ekow Eshun, in writing for the exhibition catalogue, suggests that: 'Maybe the woman who stands with arms raised in a glade of purple

and orange-leaved matoke trees in *Soaring (I)* (2024), holding space in communion with the environment, is illustrative of the form a Black relationship with nature might take when it is not predicated on legacies of colonial power, a relationship founded instead on kinship and connection and a belief in the worth and wonder of people and place. So that to walk on the land is to walk with the land. It is to raise your hands up into a canopy of purple and orange leaves and feel a kind of soaring as you do so'.

Film and feminist literature are fundamental to Kimeze's research, and the exhibition title is inspired by a line from the poem *Night at the Roller Palace* by January Gill O'Neil. A new series of paintings shown in the Main Gallery was originally inspired by Kimeze's interest in the resurgence of the popularity of roller skating in Black communities in the UK and USA, including in her own neighbourhood in east London. Ultimately, however, these works explore ideas of freedom and flight, escape and exhilaration, particularly from a female perspective. Folkloric accounts of mystical women in flight were influential in this, whilst

Arches 2024
Oil, pastel and oil stick on suede matboard
110 x 90 cm



some of the works on paper in the Fire Station galleries are based on film stills, including from the 1970s film *Get Rollin'*.

Other works depict hazy female figures set within abstracted interiors rendered through patterns, arches, and other isolated architectural features. The paintings have a distinctive luminosity and texture, created by Kimeze's use of materials, including dry chalks, oil pastel and wet paints applied to suede matboard, paper and canvas. A newly

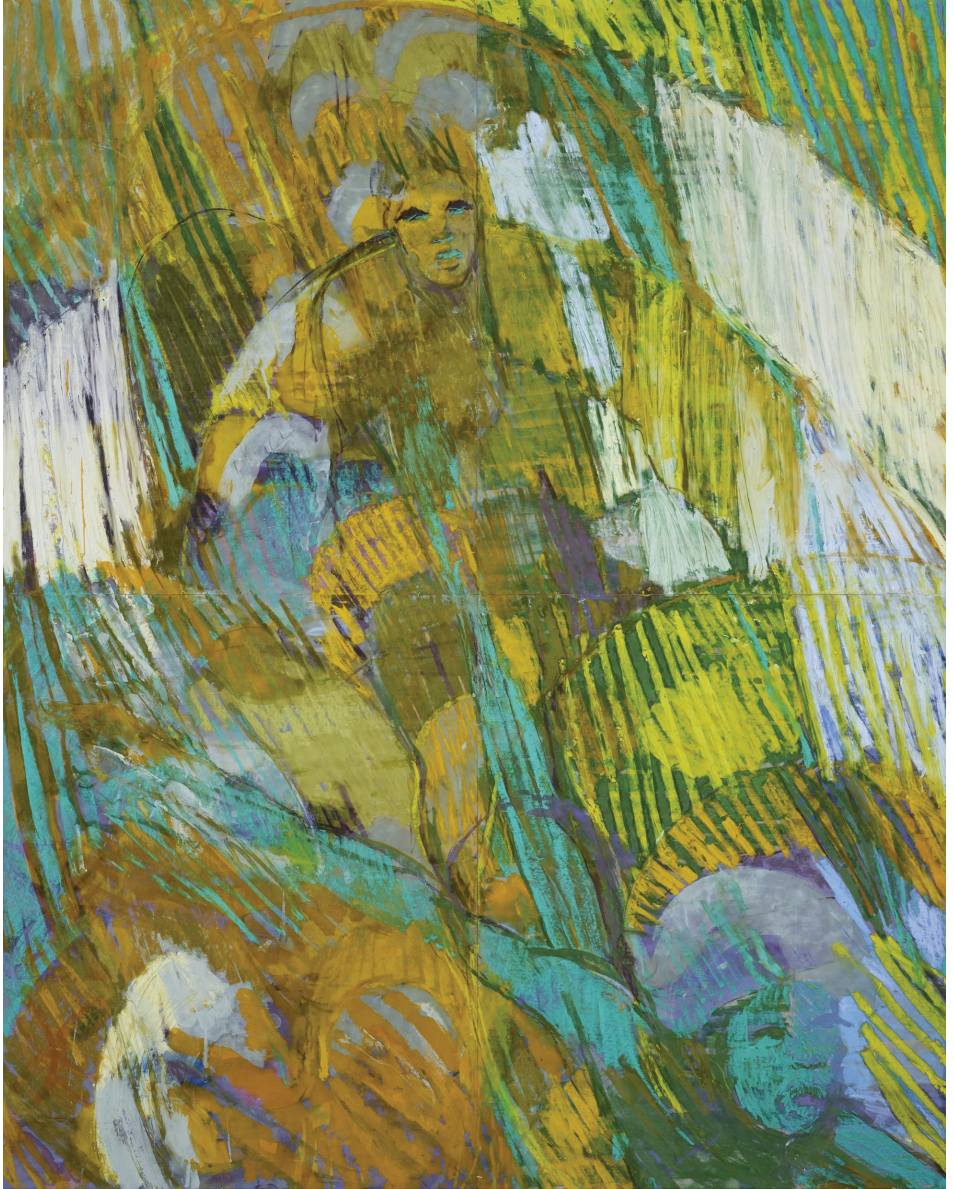
commissioned tapestry, made by Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh, is a reinterpretation of Kimeze's painting titled *Blue Doorway, 2024*.

The following extract is taken from a conversation between the writer and art historian, Alayo Akinkugbe, and Christina Kimeze, which took place in November 2024 and is included in the exhibition catalogue.

CK: Through my research, I became intrigued by the way people describe feelings of freedom and flight when they talk about roller skating. That really interested me, because I'm often looking for some sort of anchor to visually represent what it is to explore oneself and one's inner life. Freedom obviously means different things to different people, but there's something about roller skating which seems to engender these feelings of freedom and of flight. This has led me to research folklore about women, specifically, who fly. Roller skating, as a subject, was a gateway into the larger paintings, which are more to do with flight.

I've been reading about magical flight in the book *Women who Fly: Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and other Airborne Females*. It is quite

Soaring (III), 2024
Oil, pastel and oil stick on suede matboard
210 × 165 cm



Screen (I), 2024
Oil, pastel and oil stick on suede matboard
110 × 90 cm

a religious idea and it's discussed mainly in relation to dancing, but you could apply it to roller skating. It's the feeling you have when your body stays on the ground, but your soul is flying. I thought it was really beautiful.

AA: That's fascinating, I think the larger paintings have a strong sense of flight and upward movement – for instance, in the raised arms of a figure, or in the vertical lines extending from the banana leaf motif, which recurs across your work.

CK: I think that in my past work, having a sense of elongating the body has been quite important, specifically in reference to feminist writers who have talked about a sense of feeling tall. That's something which I've always come back to in the work: trying to elongate the body and to create this sense of uplift. They are quite joyous paintings, really.

AA: In this body of work there are often multiple figures in one painting, as opposed to some of your recent bodies of work, in which they appear alone.

CK: In the past I've looked at figures on their own, but I've become interested in places where experience

is shared. Roller skating can be individual, and you don't tend to get so many rinks in the UK; it's more of an American thing. But I like the idea of people sharing experiences. If you're doing a routine or dance, you're doing the same thing at the same time as other people, but you're having a very different experience. I find that interesting and that's why groups of figures are coming into the work.

AA: The larger paintings have quite distorted perspectives. It takes some looking to register the presence of all the figures, and they don't immediately reveal themselves to the



Between wood and wheel, 2024
Oil, pastel and oil stick on suede matboard
210 × 165 cm

viewer. Many figures are cropped, and in some instances it seems as though we are observing the scene from above, until a close-up of a face becomes apparent in the corner somewhere.

CK: I've been exploring perspective in the larger paintings. A painting will usually give you a sense of perspective and idea of where you are in relation to the subject, but I'm trying to challenge that. In some of the paintings the perspective is almost flipped, with the figure in the background higher up than the figure in the foreground. I flipped the

perspective because my work is quite felt and I wanted to capture something of the feeling of being in a rink, with lots of people moving in different directions and cutting across you.

AA: The title of this exhibition is *Between Wood and Wheel*. Why did this phrase feel apt for this body of work?

CK: It's a line from the poem *Night at the Roller Palace* by January Gill O'Neil: 'you are the spark between wood and wheel'. I chose it as a nod to roller skating as the catalyst for this body of work, but it also speaks to the more universal ideas that I'm exploring with the work, of sitting between two things, two states of being and atomising the self. I also like the reference to wood, which is solid and static, in contrast to the circular form of the wheel which is associated with movement. It evokes an idea of being sandwiched between two different, somewhat competing, things; the leaden and the airborne in dialogue with one another.



All images © Christina Kimeze, courtesy of the artist. Photos: Matthew Hollow

ABOUT CHRISTINA KIMEZE

Christina Kimeze lives and works in London. She studied at The Royal Drawing School postgraduate programme 2021–2022 where she was awarded the Sir Denis Mahon award; and received her undergraduate degree at the University of Oxford in Biological Sciences.

Recent exhibitions include: Women & Freud: patients, pioneers, artists, Freud Museum, London (2024); Drawing Biennial 2024, Drawing Room (2024); Soulscapes, Dulwich Picture Gallery (2024); Present Tense, Hauser and Wirth, Bruton (2024); Something other than the world might know, White Cube, Paris (2023); Interior, Michael Werner Gallery, London (2023); and The Great Women Artists IV, Residency at Palazzo Monti, Brescia, Italy (2022).

CATALOGUE

A beautifully illustrated catalogue to accompany the exhibition is available in the SLG shop for the special price of £30. It includes essays by Ekow Eshun, writer and curator; and Eleanor Nairne, The Keith L. and Katherine Sachs, Curator for Modern and Contemporary Art and Head of Department at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and a conversation between the artist and the writer, art historian and founder of Instagram platform, @ABlackHistoryOfArt, Alayo Akinkugbe.

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Get Rollin (I), 2024, Gouache on paper


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