

The uncanny creations of this painter and sound artist twist and turn somewhere between reality and things remembered

Skye Sherwin

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Art becomes a spirited game of interpretation in Ivan Seal's small-scale oil paintings. The objects he shows seem ordinary enough: you could be looking at the handle of a chisel, left casually hanging off the edge of a block, or a lump of clay rolled into a sausage. What Seal paints appears so plain and simple it's almost funny. Yet there's something not quite right about these little canvases.

Up close, his dense painted surfaces refuse to settle down: the intricate detail of an ornamental clock or a stack of shredded paper becomes a mutating jumble of colour that does not seem to reflect real life. He often sets his subject matter against limitless black backdrops, like the objects have just been thrown up from the void. In fact, Seal paints largely from memory at the rate of a work a day, making his approach improvised and automatic. Yet with the paint applied in thick brushstrokes, or sculpted with a palette knife, the artworks themselves are very much of this world. They dart back and forth between reality and the distortion of things remembered.

Born in Stockport in 1973 and now based in Berlin, Seal recently returned to painting after years focusing on sound art. Partly inspired by Brian Eno's ideas about open-ended but systematic "generative music", his current soundworks are a babble of language, with computer-generated word associations creating endless sentences, their meaning evolving as the computer program rolls along.

His paintings similarly suggest freeform stories. Exhibited in groups, they share subject matter, scale and an antique palette, but are conceived independently of one another and shown out of chronological order.

Moving through uncanny images of ornaments and sculptures, including the outright Gothic vision of a slumped doll with a hooded head, thoughts twist and turn to galleries and your grandparents' mantelpiece, ETA Hoffmann's weird tales and cosmic black holes. Memories wander down any number of snaking, associative paths, as much our own making as they are Seal's.

Why we like him: Echoing his sound art, Seal's paintings take their titles from computer-generated words. In *Raggottiss Dalowercist* (2011), the rainbow strata of a hunk of crystal becomes a swirling vortex of colours, like a portal on the wall.

Word play: One of Seal's formative influences was playing the multiple-choice fantasy game *Dungeons and Dragons* as a kid. "To me, this idea that you sit around a table and enter a different world as a group, just with language, is totally radical," he says.

Where can I see him? At the Carl Freedman gallery, London, until 18 June 2011.