

ERIN LAWLOR

London Fields

commentary by
David Rhodes



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A publication of George Lawson Gallery
on the occasion of the exhibition:

Erin Lawlor

four paintings

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***Gatecrasher*, 2014**
oil on canvas
15.75 x 11.75 in. (40 x 29.85 cm)
cat. no. ERL41

London-based painter Erin Lawlor, who for many years prior lived and worked in Paris, is gaining ever wider recognition through her international exhibitions, as well as her curatorial forays and her online chronicling of the painting scene in Europe and New York. This series of modestly-scaled oils is named for the park, and by extension the district, in East London adjacent to Lawlor's new studio, located in the borough of Hackney.

Lawlor manages to refocus the classic tropes of gestural abstraction with a unity of parts that could be described as interstitial. She achieves a bonded whole both in her surface and her imagery through the viscous flow of her medium and the intermixed, tertiary colors of her palette, always eliciting a sense of suspended animation in the process.

Many thanks to Erin Lawlor for her help with this project and to David Rhodes for his cogent essay.

George Lawson
San Francisco, January 2015



ERIN LAWLOR

LONDON FIELDS

Vilém Flusser's (1920-1991) definition of gesture is, "a movement of the body, or a tool of the body, for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation. Meaning must be discovered in relation to movement," and, he goes on to say, "The painter does not have freedom, he/she is in the gesture of painting." On beginning to work with thinned paint on a canvas placed directly on the floor, Erin Lawlor herself observed, "In any case it abolishes, or at least reduces, I find, the distancing of the eye that there is when working vertically; on the ground, you are above and within, it's a different physical relationship, of both interaction and movement." This involvement with making in the moment and its trace – that particular alertness and willingness to engage without lengthy reflection – involves not just risk but also responsiveness closely allied to such an involvement. It is an act of generosity that the result of this process – a painting – is then later available dialectically for a viewer.

Lawlor's paintings can recall the visual and performative aspects characteristic of Willem de Kooning's (1904-1997) oeuvre from the 1980s. De Kooning's works from this period evince "unselfconscious grandeur and grace" to quote Robert Storr. Still using an entwined, curved, and twisting brush mark – but now not subject to potentially endless revisions in reworking (two years on *Woman 1*, from 1950 to 1952) – these paintings, relatively neglected in the 1980s, now look more and more significant. As one of a later generation who has no sense of depleted expectation when it comes to the arc of de Kooning's career, Lawlor regards gestural abstraction as anything but exhausted of possibility, and endeavors to prove it in her paintings.

For Lawlor the relationship of surface and facture is something that engages with process, and hence, time. Essentially, the trace of paint from a brush stroke, in the artist's own words "can constitute all at once both space, volume, shape and time." Inside/outside conflate, consciousness/physicality too, and for all that the paintings,

it is true to say, remain silent. The calligraphic comparison that has been made between linear gesture and writing can be seen in relation to precedents referred to as “Pseudoinscriptions,” calligraphic elements combined to signify nothing as writing, but rather, to be appreciated for their formal, visual impact, as well as their associative connection to the assumed power of words. This is seen, to give just three examples, in the borders of some early Italian Renaissance painting, Arabic inscriptions on Persian 15th century Koranic texts or again Turkish prayer rugs from the 17th century. Wittgenstein believed that verbal expression replaces and does not describe – words replacing the very things they address. Though unavoidably associative, painting similarly partially exists in lieu of experience; the past is present as a recorded process, and new experiences are made available in viewing finished paintings.

In opposing Geometric Abstraction, both Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism elevated a spontaneous approach over composition, structure, and a priori rational decision-making. The Surrealists’ interest in automatic writing also enabled the act of painting to be foregrounded. The use of gesture and color in Lawlor’s paintings clearly incorporate art historical roots, as well as current interpretations of gesture – as in the works of Pierre Soulage, Howard Hodgkin and Per Kirkeby.

Lawlor’s color is often earth-toned with greys and blacks though notably bursts of saturated hues and translucent layers have become more prominent in recent paintings. This range puts me in mind of Francisco Goya’s (1746-1828) somber but radiant palette. Lawlor, like Goya, interestingly, also works speedily. Later in Goya’s career, paintings begun with a spontaneous drawing in black on a tanned-red ground were not unusual. Lawlor begins with a resonant ground, sometimes the result of painting out a previous painting, the color consequently an aggregate of several previous colors.

The eponymously titled *London Fields*, 2014 (p. 35), includes wide sweeps of violet-grey, black and warm rust that turn on themselves, back and forth as if in a motion, like air currents or tidal reach, as much as we know they actually mark the progress of the artist’s hand. There is a flow, like convected heat, up and down, the brush marks almost completely filling the canvas. *The Crossing*, 2014 (p. 19), has a different dynamic again. Quicker motions of brush marks moving parallel to both the picture plane and the

canvas edge have their own centripetal force. A central arabesque diagonally establishes a deep space that in turn forms a horizontal internal edge, behind which a wave of pale off-white moves against a dark grey. The fluctuation of light from dark to light reverses expectations of paler color being more forward in space and generates a cool radiance. In all Lawlor’s paintings, since she stopped making more overtly figurative works from around 2000 on, she has used wide brushes – wide in relation to the size of the canvas – the better to record time elapsing and movements through space. In *Summer*, 2014 (p. 17), wide brush marks weave four shapes that are always still brush marks, and not means to describe or outline forms – they are the forms. At the same time, because of their variegated transparencies, reflections of light, color and space are seen in and through the brush mark. Small, but crucial, accumulations of paint, squeezed out, or flung off a brush tracking back and forth, changing speed, add to the pictorial depth of *Unapt to Stir*, 2013 (p. 15). The accumulations emphasize a resistant surface, a visual and material fact vertiginously contra to the rhythmic unfolding of space that appears beneath. The range of color is warm – rose, ocher, olive and brown. Temperature, speed and contrast are constantly changing from painting to painting. *Hold-up*, 2014 (p. 23), is more disjunctive than many recent paintings, and less cursive. The two vertical strokes of a brush on either side of the painting introduce an oblique and humorous figurative element given the title – a reminder perhaps that however abstract these paintings are, they embody the scale and action of the artist’s body.

While Lawlor’s concerns for elapsed time and movement through space remain a constant in the current body of work, produced over the last year and a half since her return to East London, an expansive development of complexity, both in the range of color, tonal reach and varying pace, clearly seems to be underway. And at the same time, as more variation is introduced, so the paintings seem to be ever more distinctly Lawlor’s own, as the particularities become increasingly defined.

David Rhodes

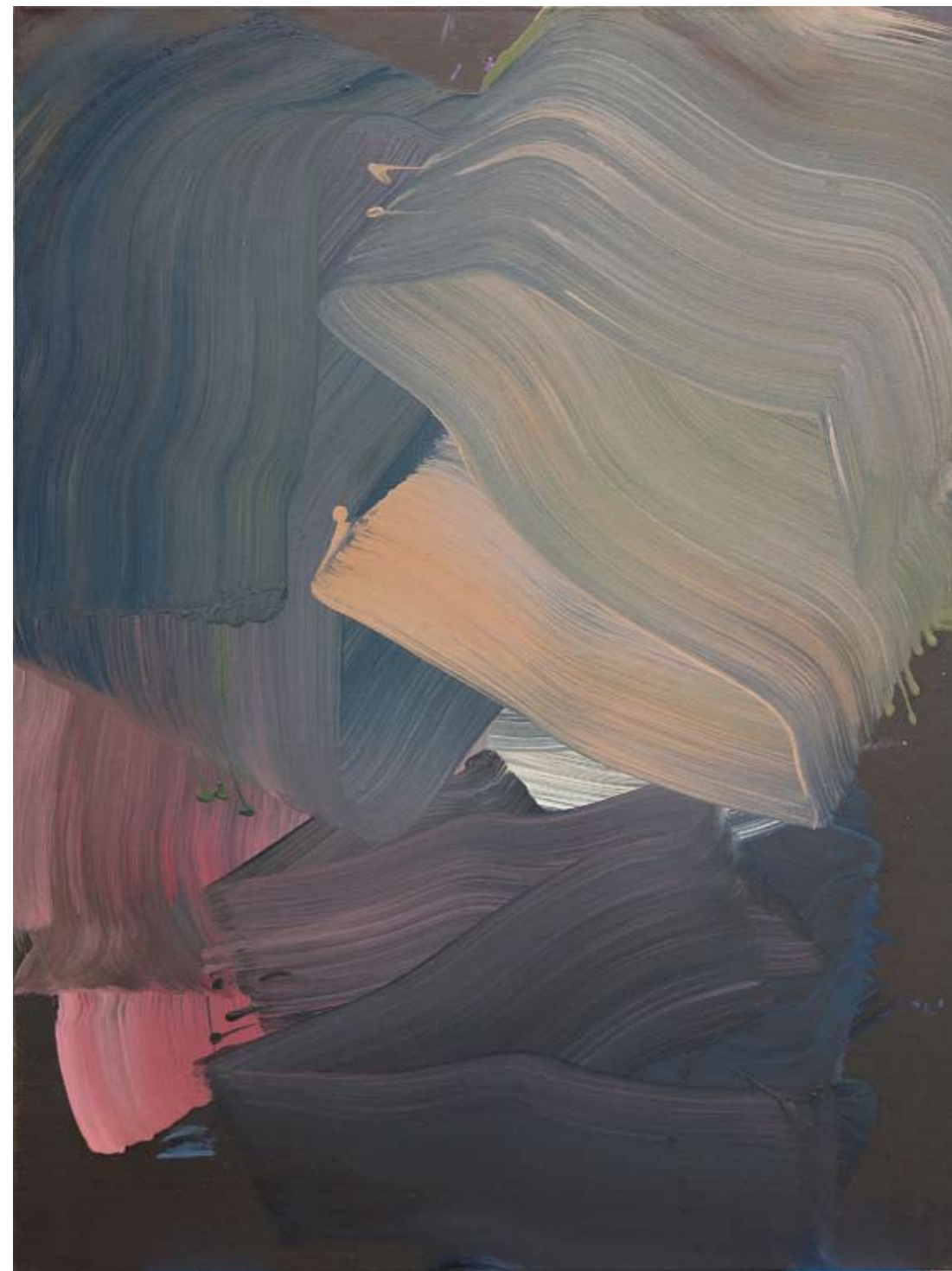
New York, January 2015

David Rhodes is an artist, curator and critical writer and frequent contributor to Artforum, ArtCritical and The Brooklyn Rail. He lives and works in Berlin and New York.

***Bugsy*, 2013**
oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
cat. no. ERL35



Unapt to Stir, 2013
oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
cat. no. ERL36



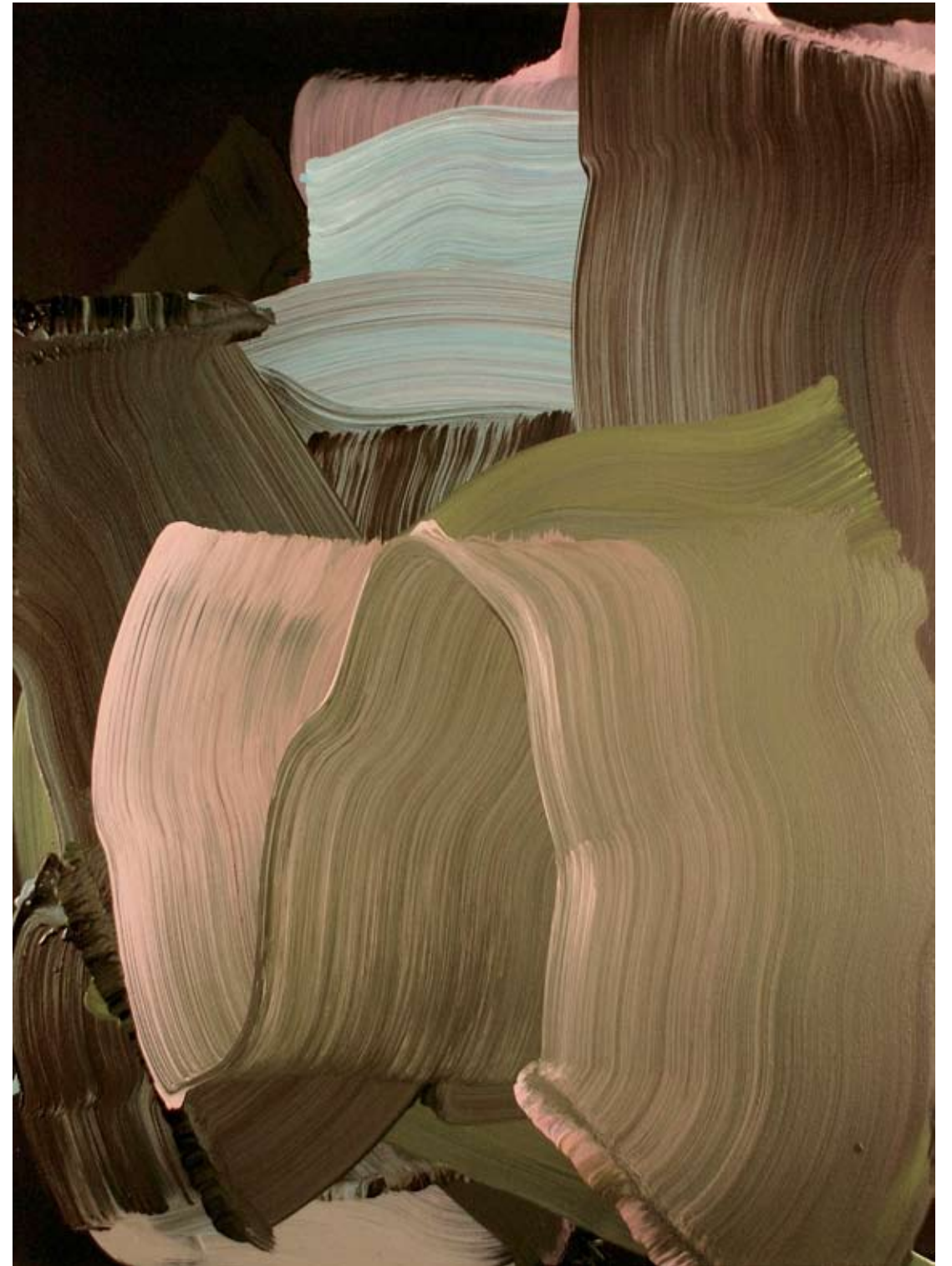
Summer, 2014
oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
cat. no. ERL44



The Crossing, 2014
oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
cat. no. ERL45



The Player, 2014
oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
cat. no. ERL46



Hold-up, 2014
oil on canvas
23 x 20 in. (58.42 x 50.8 cm)
cat. no. ERL47



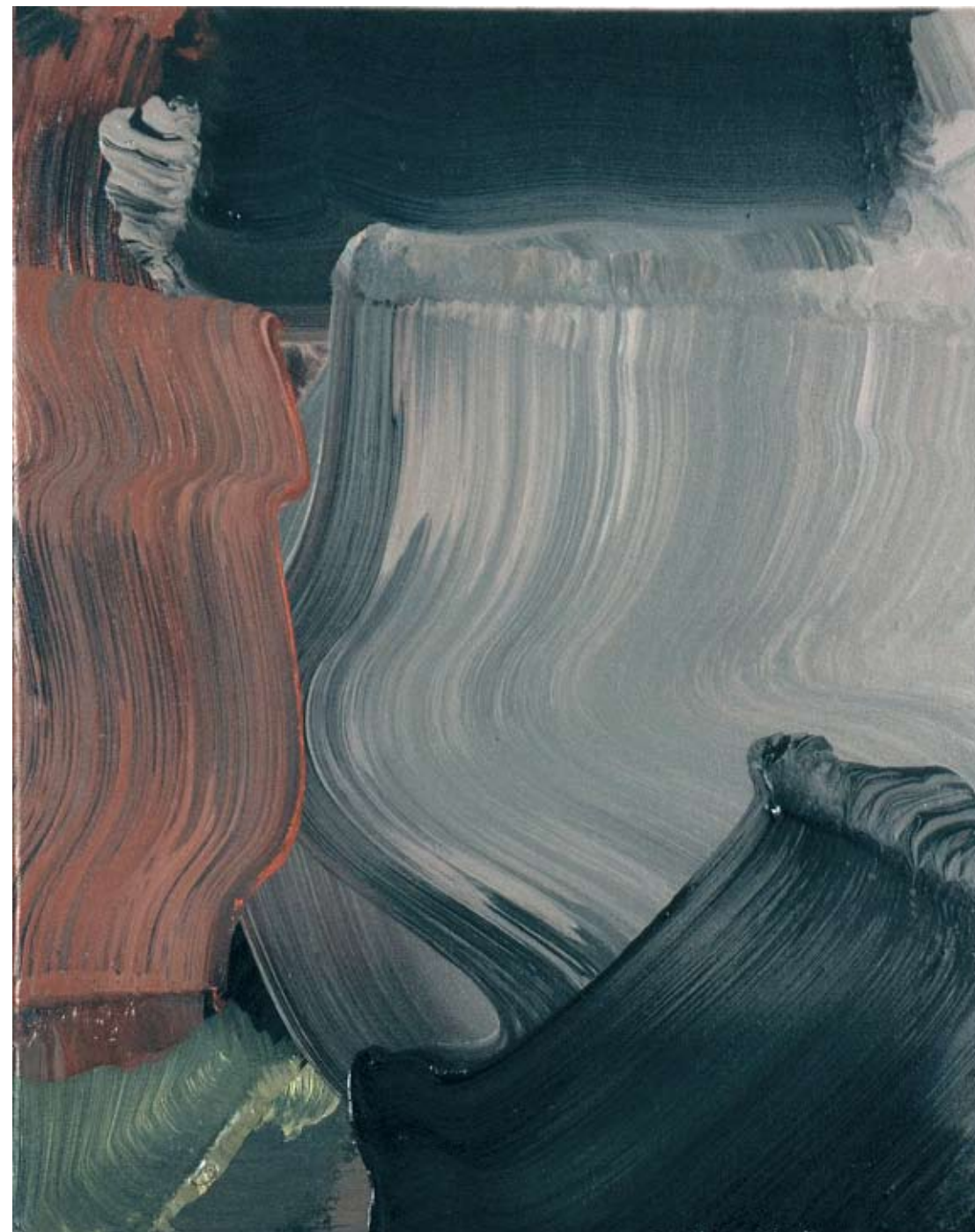
M & M, 2014
oil on canvas
24 x 18 in. (61 x 45.72 cm)
cat. no. ERL48



Crow's Cloud, 2014
oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
cat. no. ERL57



Sweeney, 2014
oil on canvas
20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.64 cm)
cat. no. ERL50



Land of the Vilde Chaya, 2014
oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
cat. no. ERL51



One of Two Owls, 2014
oil on canvas
23.5 x 20 in. (59.68 x 50.8 cm)
cat. no. ERL52



London Fields, 2014
oil on canvas
48 x 36 in. (121.92 x 91.44 cm)
cat. no. ERL53



Winter Solstice, 2014
oil on canvas
20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.64 cm)
cat. no. ERL54



Haze (Desired), 2014
oil on canvas
30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm)
cat. no. ERL55



Groucho's Girl, 2014
oil on canvas
30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm)
cat. no. ERL56





ERIN LAWLOR

Born Epping, England, 1969.

Lived and worked in France 1987-2012.

Currently lives and works in London

Selected Exhibitions

- 2015** *Four Paintings*, George Lawson Gallery, San Francisco
Arbeiten auf Papier, Galerie Klaus Braun, Stuttgart
- 2014** *Painting Black*, Sylvia Wald/Po Kim gallery, New York
Small is Beautiful, Flowers Gallery, New York
Ellipse, A Partial Inventory From The West, a3 Gallery, Moscow
London Calling, St Chamas, France
Artis Natura Magistra, cloître des Billetes, Paris
Long Loud Silence, Gray Contemporary, Houston
Women in the Dunes, George Lawson Gallery, San Francisco
Summer Saloon, Lion & Lamb Gallery, London
Off Line, On Mark, Parallel Art Space, Ridgewood, NY
Mind the Gap, L.A.-London, Autonomie gallery, Los Angeles
Nothing But Good Live, Park Platform for Visual Arts, Tilburg, The Netherlands
- 2013** *Ausklang und Auftakt*, Corona Unger Gallery, Bremen, Germany
Small is Beautiful, Flowers Gallery, London
The Nature of Abstraction, Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, CA
Recent Paintings, George Lawson Gallery, San Francisco (catalog)
Reason and Romance, 6b-Elingen Gallery, Belgium
What I like About You, Parallel Art Space, New York and Ridgewood/Imogen Holloway Gallery, Saugerties, NY
Emergence, Hotel de Sauroy, Paris
- 2012** *Recent Paintings*, George Lawson Gallery, Los Angeles
Anima, Espace Mezcla, Rouen, France
Turbulence, George Lawson Gallery, Los Angeles
Erin Lawlor, Knott Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
Moveable Feast, Hotel de Sauroy, Paris
- 2011** *Jeune Création*, Paris
Exposition Inaugurale, Espace d'art contemporain Mezcla, Rouen, France
Oeuvres Sur Papier, Galerie Pascaline Mulliez, Paris
Chic Dessin Art Fair, Paris
Jérémy Chabaud et Erin Lawlor, Centre d'art Le Bois aux Moines, Lavaré, France
- 2010** *Peintures*, Galerie Pascaline Mulliez, Paris
- 2009** *Peintures*, Hôtel de Sauroy, 75003 Paris
- 2006** *Paintings*, Turf Gallery, London (catalog)
Paintings, Salon de Montrouge, France

