

“Women always bring it back to the personal,' said Handsome. 'It's why you can't be world leaders.'

'And men never do,' I said, 'which is why we end up with no world left to lead.’”

— [Jeanette Winterson, \*The Stone Gods\*](#)

The work of Anwen Keeling is defined by feminine beauty. It is a world of soft tones, gentle curves and reposed thought. Light plays across a form as a liquid element caressing and defining its own trajectory insensible to pattern and mood. The woman herself: young; beautiful; supple is defined by form. Keeling however, poses an alternate reading. Like Winterson, she posits beauty and its cohorts, domesticity and the female sensibility, as intrinsic and essential to what it means to be human. Elements to be acknowledged, without being a slight.

Effectively the Keeling figure is enigmatic, invested in personal cognition whereby the sensuality of form is rendered secondary to the intimacy of thought. Indeed, the viewer is cast within the narrative as voyeur, an intruder never able to enter the evocative space of the personal. There is something of Edward Hopper and Gwen John in this paradox of broken narrative, in that the figure, while emotionally and compositionally central, remains ephemeral. It is this disparity between invitation and engagement that draws the viewer in. The perfection of the girl's breast in XXX for example, is both tantalizing and distracting; it questions our gaze, our judgment and desire. It is however, tangible, and in being so, understood. Conversely, the mood of the room, while made up of concrete elements, is fleeting. Light in particular conveys the single unique moment, in this case casting a diaphanous veil across our reading on the room's colours and form. And it is within this intensely personal space that the viewer becomes engaged with the sitter's contemplation. Devoid of censure or self-consciousness, an open book, she is however, clearly not engaged with the room or any aspect the viewer is invited to share.

The XXX paintings continue the narrative of intensely personal space. The figure is vulnerable and again entirely feminine, yet the viewer is disallowed entry to the inner monologue. Rather, the paintings blur and switch between narrative and composition. To wit, the figure, while central to the space does not dominate, rather, it is the interruption of light's flow that forms the central narrative and ultimately invests the curve of the figure as landscape.

Painting with oil on Belgium linen, Keeling is enamored by the act of painting. Painting for painting's sake, she nurtures paint's ability to describe light through the glowing layers of transparent colour that shimmer within the rich lead white, umbers and ultramarine of her palette.