An abstract painting by David Egan titled 'Cell Theory'. The artwork is a complex composition of overlapping, organic shapes and textures. The color palette is diverse, featuring deep blues, earthy greens, warm yellows, and soft pinks. The forms suggest biological structures, possibly cells or tissues, with some areas showing a grid-like pattern that might represent a cell membrane or a network of fibers. The overall effect is one of intricate detail and vibrant energy.

David Egan  
*Cell Theory*

Neon Parc acknowledges the traditional owners and sovereign custodians of the land on which we operate, the peoples of the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung language groups. We extend our respect to their Ancestors and all First Peoples and Elders past, present, and future.

# David Egan

## *Cell Theory*

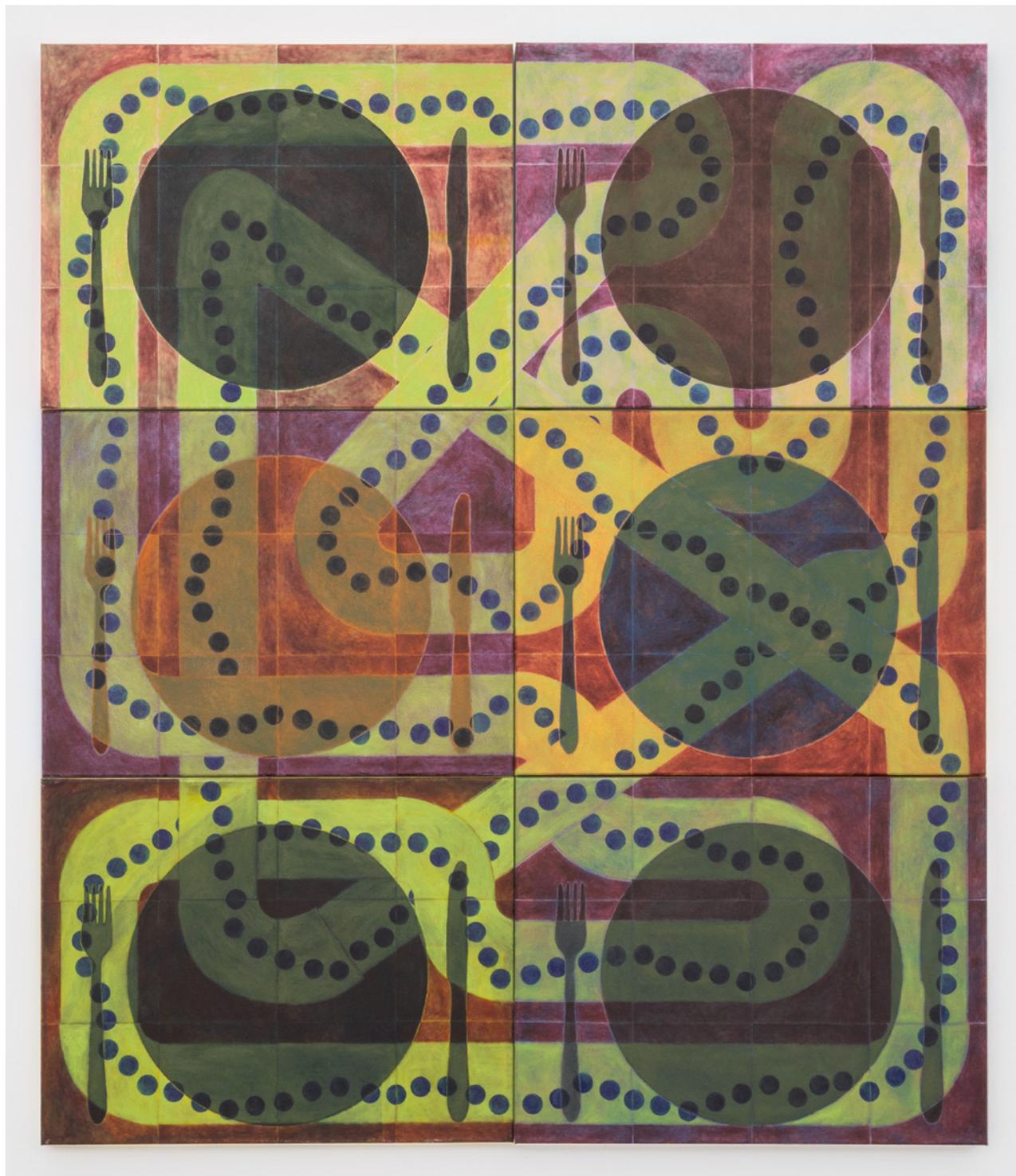
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David Egan  
*Reading group*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
107 x 122 cm



David Egan  
*Chain of sensations*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
51 x 66 cm



David Egan  
*Table Turning*, 2024  
Oil on canvas  
154.5 x 132 cm (six panels)



David Egan  
*Faun into fountain*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
117 x 96.5 cm



David Egan  
*Plant*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 122 cm



David Egan  
*Full of holes*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
117 x 96.5 cm

# Pip Wallis

## *Bodyly and goostely*

In her text *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich (1343 – c. 1416) describes her visions of God as both “bodyly” and “goostely” sight.<sup>1</sup> She moves between visual and spiritual seeing, making little distinction between them. She returns over and over to particular visions, re-viewing them from different angles and perspectives, creating multiplicitous, fractured scenes. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s description, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, of seeing “from one place or another, but not from everywhere at once” feels pertinent.<sup>2</sup> This hybrid vision is the logic of Egan’s paintings which render a mode of seeing that is both bodyly and goostely in order to generate an empirical mysticism.

We experience, when looking at Egan’s works, a constant movement of the eye between layers of the paint and between perspectival depths; perhaps a figure under a grid under swathes of line. Similarly, our recognition moves between the paint as matter and as representation. This fluidity is akin to watching a projected image move in and out of focus, or seeing and then not seeing a constellation in the starry sky. We access the kind of perceptual plasticity visible in *I came out the door I went in* (2025), which moves between planes in a way that implies access to parallel realms.

A number of Egan’s works in *Cell Theory* draw on historical images which each represent holistic ways of conceiving our place in the cosmos. *Under the weather* (2025) echoes Botticelli’s *Map of Hell* (1480 – 90), a schematic of the artist’s interpretation of the layers of hell as described in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (c. 1321). *Stars in my pocket like grains of sand* (2025) takes its circular forms from a map of the universe, including the crystalline heaven and the realm of angels, printed in the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493). These Early Renaissance cosmologies locate the human and the divine in direct relation to each other, existing not necessarily on the same plane but certainly within the same dimension.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Collin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 71.

Perhaps the most influential text in shaping this cosmology and affiliated spiritual guidance was Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (1274), which itself was the inspiration for Dante's epic. Amongst many philosophical and scientific theses, Aquinas theorised a form of empiricism which argues that sensations are a necessary step in acquiring knowledge. Specifically, he charts the process as thus: 1. Perception of the object and creation of a sense-image in the mind; 2. Recollection of this imagined form (phantasm); 3. Interpretation of the imagined form by the intellect. He quotes Aristotle, "The soul understands nothing without a phantasm."<sup>3</sup> The importance of empirical experience as a route to understanding is also at the core of mysticism. As Elvia Wilk points out, Christian female mystics were often excluded from theological intellectual life and so accessed spirituality through direct sensorial experiences.<sup>4</sup>

As an anchoress, Julian of Norwich lived a great proportion of her adult life sequestered in a cell in spiritual meditation. *Revelations of Divine Love* (the first known book in English by a woman) details the sixteen visions she experienced over two nights in May, 1373. She recounts her first vision:

And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, "What may this be?" And it was answered generally thus, "It is all that is made."<sup>5</sup>

Inside the cell seeing the whole, the micro and the macro concertina, telescoping through space and perceptual realms. Egan's painting *Metabolise your world* (2025) contains a hazelnut-like sphere in reference to Julian's vision.

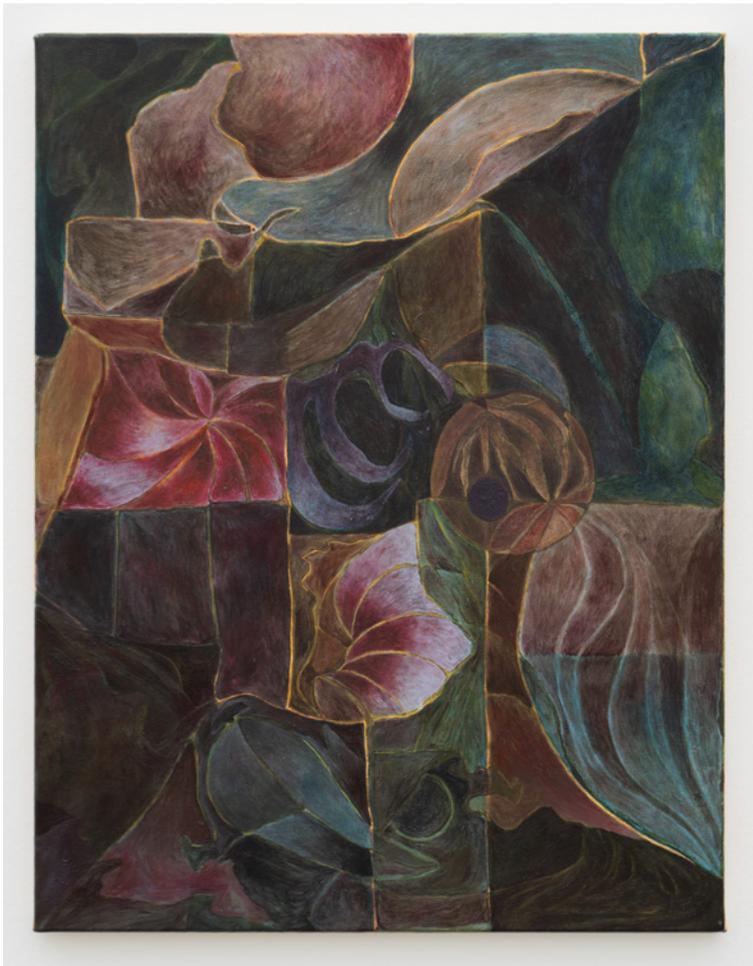


David Egan  
*Stars in my pocket like grains of sand, 2025*  
Oil on canvas  
198.2 x 182.5

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas and Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars: Volume 3, Human Beings and God's Governance of Creation*, QQ 75-119: With the Commentary of Cardinal Cajetan (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2024), 1151.

<sup>4</sup> Elvia Wilk, *Death by Landscape* (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2022), 69–92.

<sup>5</sup> Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich, 2 Volume Set*, eds. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1977).



David Egan  
*Metabolise your world*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 51 cm

The round nut is surrounded by spiralling forms which coalesce, invoking the indivisibility of all matter and the perceptual expansiveness of mystic vision, specifically a vision in which “all that is made” is both small and infinite.

Julian speaks elsewhere in *Revelations* of “oneing” with God; an ontology of synthesis in which she is returned to a state of complete union with God who made her. Such dissolution of the subject runs through Egan’s works. In particular, *A smell of burning dust* (2025) spirals outward from an iris-like central point with forms that simultaneously suggest human tendons, plant matter and galactic winds. “Oneing” may be, as Wilk argues, a way out of the Anthropocene by undoing hierarchies and singular perspectives in favour of a breakdown of everything at the level of cells or molecules into a great flux.

Cell, from the Latin *cella* meaning small room, is the name for microscopic matter and a monk’s dwelling. This dichotomy of primary materiality and transcendental contemplation anchors *Cell Theory*. The cellular materiality of our bodies is present in the gut-like twisting folds of *Metabolise your world* (2025); the movement of cells, beads, units down intestinal paths in *Full of holes* (2025); the icon of a plate in *Table Turning* (2024). This last round form, open and blank like an invitation, evokes the host, the piece of wafer given during Holy Communion. Rather than representing the body of Christ, Catholics believe the host becomes the body of Christ through the mystery of transubstantiation. Such ambiguous tension between representation and materiality characterises my experience of Egan’s paintings — the feeling of simultaneously being inside a body and without a body induces a sensation of atomisation, tiny particles moving simultaneously in all directions. I know that I look at Egan’s paintings, but I also understand them to invite my other perceptual capacities.

The host often bears an image, which implies that we might experience a picture by means other than sight, “where the eye cannot go” writes Jérémie Koering in *Iconophages* (2024). Following an account detailed in the

sixth or seventh century (known as Miracle 15 in the *Vita* of Saints Cosmas and Damian), Koering writes of a woman from Constantinople who was cured of colic by eating the image of the two saints, or more specifically, the plaster scraped from the wall where she had painted their image.<sup>6</sup> The miracle occurred not due to the likeness of the painting to the saints, nor the contemplation of the image by the sick woman, but by the physical ingestion of the substance of the image itself. Such an intimacy between the subject of the painting, the image represented by the painting, and the material of the painting is the trinity by which I understand Egan's works in *Cell Theory*.

His works draw on medieval cosmology and science fiction as subject but equally as method. If accounts of spiritual visions show how the image, matter and the body can be transcendental, then science fiction provides a means to mobilise such possibilities away from theology for other aims including ecological redemption and queerness. *The moons beneath our feet* (2025) has us floating through Sebastiano Serlio's architectural illustration of 1540. Serlio's illustration was intended to convey an Euclidean heaven, geometry which is in its perfection an expression of the divine. In Egan's version three circles overlap across the front plane of the painting, the multiple moons suggested by the title.

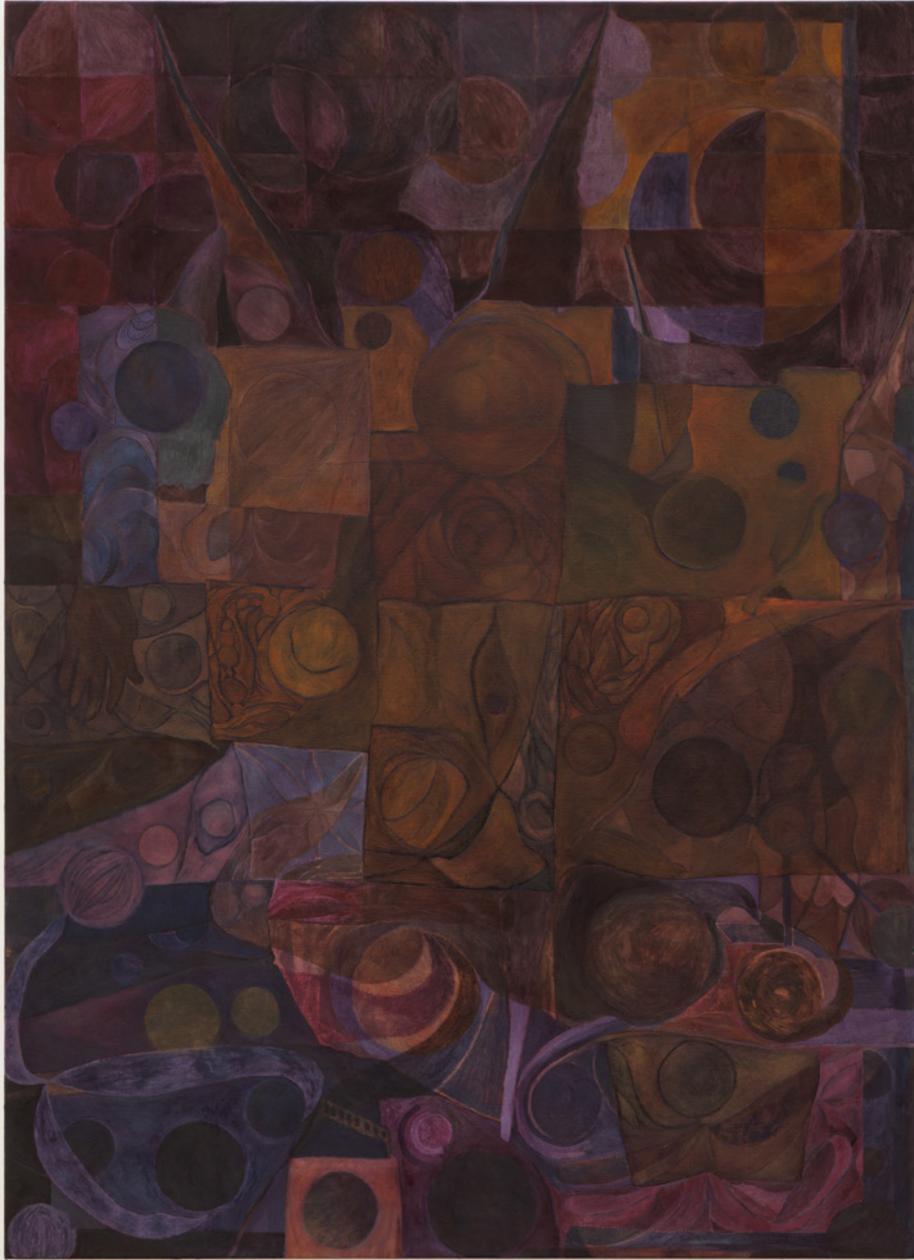
The vista of speculative celestial bodies and gravity-free movement in *The moons beneath our feet* recalls Egan's radio play, *Cells* (2020)<sup>7</sup>, in which characters named after Christian female mystics experience divine cellular commingling on a futuristic virtual plane composed of pure colour. Before she amalgamates into Margery, Teresa seeks a particular blue from the Spec VR program, "More sky and less water. I want to hover, not float!" This is the blue I see in the sky of Antonello da Messina's *Pietà* (1476). The painting is a very delicate portrayal of Christ supported by angels after being taken down from the cross. Fittingly the work now hangs, or hovers, in the Museo Correr where the exhibition design by Carlo Scarpa has the paintings freed from the wall on standing frames.



David Egan  
*The moons beneath our feet*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
107 x 122 cm

<sup>6</sup> Jérémie Koering, *Iconophages: A History of Ingesting Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 69–70.

<sup>7</sup> David Egan, *Cells*, (unProjects, 2020) <https://unprojects.org.au/article/david-egan/>



David Egan  
*Decreation machine*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
167.5 x 122 cm

The painting is beguiling because of damage done, at some point in its history, to the faces of Christ and the three angels, leaving ghostly void shapes in the middle of the canvas. More hovering. It is a fitting beginning point for Egan who finds here a theological image evacuated, allowing a kind of portal through the ghostly spaces to some other dimension in his work *Decreation machine* (2025). He fragments the image further; fine angel wings, silhouettes of heads and the drooping hand of Christ remain but are splintered by a grid and circles and dissolved by layers of colour. It becomes both flatter and more permeable, which is the mesmeric quality of Egan's work.

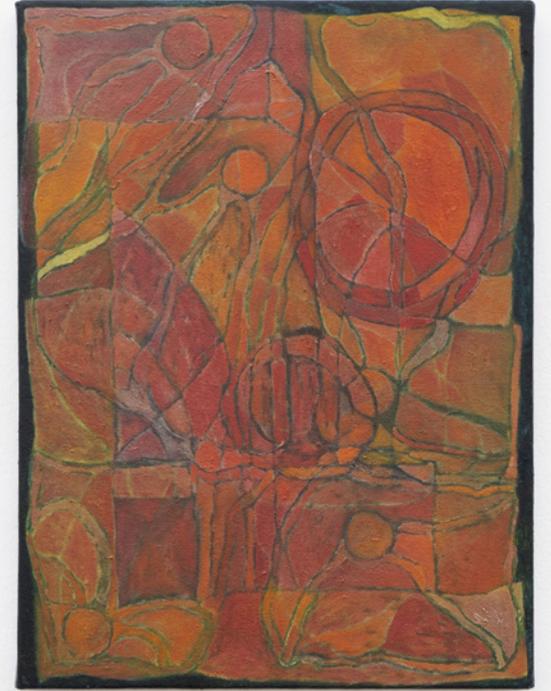
The title of the work is a reference to Simone Weil's method of self-emptying in search of God, perhaps a variation on Julian's "oneing." The physical and contemplative task of self-emptying follows in the tradition of apophatic theology which abandons intellectual inquiry and theology in favour of silence and contemplation. "Apophatic" is the Latinised form of the Greek *apophatikos*, meaning denial or negation, and is sometimes called the *via negativa* (negative way) since it defines God as unknowable and indescribable because he is beyond being. Around the same time Julian of Norwich was writing, an unknown author wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The text encourages a contemplative practice of looking for God though he is obscured by the cloud of unknowing, so all-encompassing is his divinity that it cannot be seen or understood. Instead, we rest in a "naked blind feeling of being." Body and blindness; bodily and goostely. The contradiction in terms of looking for God though he cannot be represented is the empirical mysticism within Egan's works. It feels to me like being at once within the cloud of unknowing, a nebula cloud, a cellular cloud, the surface of the painting and the boundless perceptual field of visions.

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Pip Wallis is Senior Curator at Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), Naarm/Melbourne.



David Egan  
*I came out the door I went in, 2025*  
Oil on canvas  
117 x 96.5 cm



David Egan  
*A brightness, 2025*  
Oil on canvas  
40 x 30 cm



David Egan  
*The bubbles coming up from below*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
76 x 83.5



David Egan  
*A smell of burning dust, 2025*  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 51 cm

David Egan  
*Distracted by every scent, 2024*  
Oil on canvas  
111.5 x 76 cm





David Egan  
*Under the weather*, 2025  
Oil on canvas  
152.8 x 229 cm

David Egan  
*Cell Theory*  
Neon Parc Brunswick  
23 May—21 June, 2025

Neon Parc is thrilled to present *Cell Theory*, a major exhibition of new paintings by David Egan.

In this ambitious new body of work, Egan uses the concept of the “cell”—biological, architectural, theoretical, or mechanical—as both structure and metaphor. A cell denotes a small portion of a thing, a single part in a network of many parts. This term provides the basic structure for Egan’s approach to painting, rejecting mimesis in favour of a fragmented, discursive mode of image making.

The paintings in *Cell Theory* are peppered with references to medieval systems and structures; a fountain’s plumbing, architectural studies, diagrammatic renderings of heaven and hell. Egan conflates imagery from micro-biology with macro-cosmology, observing that the world, when viewed extremely close-up or impossibly far away, appears as clusters of much the same colliding, spinning discs.

Egan’s paintings are built up incrementally over richly coloured underpainting, with delicate strokes that coalesce in luminous patches of colour. Often the works germinate from a direct image-referent, such as in *Decreation Machine* (2025), which began as a faithful rendition of Messina’s *Pietà* (1476). Through a gradual act of painting, the image-referent is atomised and abstracted — composition as decomposition. The figures of Christ and the angels who support Him in the *Pietà*, are broken down into constituent cells, their bodies fragmenting into shards of painted colour, like sunlight streaming through stained glass.

The painting *Table turning* (2024). makes reference to the spiritualist practice in which a group of people make séance with spirits by collectively tilting a table. Layered atop a group dinner setting, a line of cells bounces through a system of pipes. This structure recalls a network of plumbing, a digestive tract, or a chain of beads passed through fingers. This form’s ambiguity alludes to the potential for bodily cells to take on a multiplicity of roles depending on circumstance, desire, or need. The repeated motif of dinner plates invites the viewer to approach the paintings with the mouth as well as the eye — conceptualising viewing as a metabolic procedure. Simone Weil suggests that our greatest affliction “is that looking and eating are two different operations.” Weil writes, “Eternal beatitude is a state where to look is to eat.” Egan embraces this provocation by offering us paintings that are to be chewed slowly and with thoughtful attention.

David Egan has exhibited regularly for the past decade including the solo exhibitions *Fountain Gate*, Neon Parc (2022); *Green Seeks Little Attention*, Hayden’s Gallery, (2021); *CRYING ROOM*, Sutton Projects, (2019); *A Moveable Priest*, Bus Projects, (2018); *Actually Energy Help Light*, curated by Helen Hughes, Gertrude Contemporary, (2015); *Out Land Look Scape*, West Space, (2015); *Painting Playing Cards*, Substation, (2014) all in Naarm/ Melbourne.

Egan’s work has been included in survey shows such as *Thin Skin*, MUMA (2023); *Painting. More Painting*, ACCA (2016); *Fabrik; conceptual, minimalist and performative approaches to textiles*, Ian Potter Museum of Art and Margret Lawrence Gallery of Art (2016).

David’s book of essays on colour in painting, *Colour Handling*, was published by Discipline in 2022.

David is a Lecturer in the Department of Fine Art at Monash University, where he received his PhD in 2022.

From July 2025 he will commence a studio residency at Gertrude Contemporary.



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15 Tinning Street  
Brunswick VIC 3056  
Wed–Sat, 12–5

1 Hazeldon Plc  
South Yarra VIC 3141  
Thur–Sat, 12–5

An abstract painting featuring a complex composition of organic, overlapping shapes. The color palette is diverse, including earthy tones like browns, tans, and greens, as well as vibrant colors like blue, pink, and yellow. The texture appears layered and somewhat translucent, with some areas showing more detail than others. The overall effect is one of depth and movement, reminiscent of a microscopic view of biological tissue or a dense, textured fabric.

# Neon Parc