

SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight Lola Stong-Brett

Championed by Lindsey Mendick

ONES TO WATCH



Above: Lola Stong-Brett

Above: Lola Stong-Brett, I Gift You My Angel, oil on canvas, 2025

Interview LOLA STONG-BRETT
10 July 2025

Lola Stong-Brett is part of an exciting young generation of painters working between abstraction and figuration. A 2019 painting graduate of Edinburgh College of Art, between 2023 to 2024 Stong-Brett was a Tracey Emin Artist Resident, where she presented a culminating exhibition last summer. She remained in Margate, where she is part of a close-knit tribe of artists in the seaside town, and where she currently presents her first solo exhibition at Carl Freedman Gallery. She has previously exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy, and held solo shows at Guts Gallery, and Roman Road Gallery.

Stong-Brett's ideas often stem from her working-class background. Her upbringing attracted her early on to the depiction of cartoon characters such as Max Fleischer's Popeye and Bimbo, which resonated with her own experiences growing up. Stong-Brett draws on the lines and movement of these animations, reinterpreting them in her own fantastical figures rendered in oil, stretched to semi-abstraction but still recognisable and buoyant. She looks to Renaissance and medieval art, religious iconography, James Ensor's grotesque ambience and Philip Guston's ominous and buffoonish figures, but with her own autobiographical twist, and references to folk, tattoos and poetry (she writes her own) all of which are equal sources of inspiration. "But ultimately I'm mostly inspired by my emotions, mood states or my relationships with others." She adds that she sees her works as "a bit like diary entries."

The artist's champion for The Wick is artist Lindsey Mendick, who like Stong-Brett, forms part of Margate's vibrant artistic community. Mendick told The Wick "Stong-Brett unleashes her paintings with a raw energy that draws you in. Each quick, intense, stroke bursts forth, reflecting her emotions in the moment. To me, the works simultaneously flit between a 'fuck you' and an 'I need you'. It's as if her art soaks up every feeling and spreads it across the canvas, her thick lines in oil unashamed of commanding space. Ghostly figures emerge from her erratic lines, obsessively repeated in a quest to expel their hold over her. There's a restless energy in her approach, blending impatience with a sense of control. Her vibrant use of colour is infectious and scrumptious, showcasing her natural talent for composition as we join her in her desire to give up the ghost."

Stong-Brett's current solo exhibition includes her largest work to date, a five-panel painting that offers a grand finale to the exhibition. Titled "For That, I'll Always Smile" it represents both the technical prowess and emotive tension ever present in the young Margate-based artist's painting, where figures seem both joyful and despairing, fluid and fixed at once. Ambiguity is key in Stong-Brett's painting – each work offers a heady world with gestures could be read multiple ways – the couple in "The Other Side/Watching the Punches, Watching Love" could be holding hands or pulling punches, as the title suggests. "The Circus Act" conjures an atmosphere of a night out but also of feeling alone in a crowded room. Stong-Brett often makes you realise how closely connected apparently opposed emotions are.

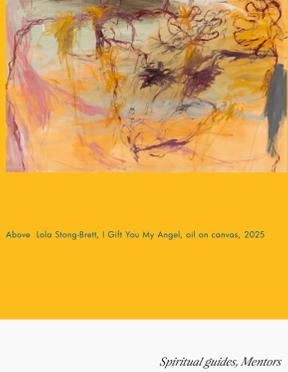
Living beside the sea in recent years has also shaped Stong-Brett's practice, the humdrum harmony of familiar pub interiors (pool tables are a motif that also hark back to the artist's early years) appearing with allusions to the unpredictable and unknowable presence of the sea beyond. Elemental colours too find their way into her world, fiery red tones and earthy serene blues seeking out these contrasts between nature and humanity. Moving seemingly between the monumental and the intimate, between high brow culture and the banal, with command and ease, Stong-Brett is an enthralling, dynamic artist refreshing painting with new ideas. Needless to say, she has an exciting year ahead – after her solo show ends at Carl Freedman she will be in the studio, preparing for her debut at Frieze London in October.

About the champion



Lindsey Mendick received an MA in Sculpture from the Royal College of Art, London. She was the recipient of the Sky Arts Visual Art Award in 2024, the Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award in 2020, the Alexandra Reinhardt memorial award in 2018 and was also selected for Jerwood Survey 2019 and the Future Generations Art Prize 2020. Mendick works predominantly with clay, a medium that is often associated with decoration and the domestic, subverting these historic connotations to create skilled monuments to 'low culture' and the contemporary female experience. Often culminating in elaborate installations, Mendick's autobiographical work offers a form of catharsis, encouraging the viewer to explore their own personal history through the revisionist lens of the artist. Her work challenges the male gaze, promoting instead an unapologetic, humorous and, at times, grotesque femininity.

"Stong-Brett unleashes her paintings with a raw energy that draws you in."



Above: Lola Stong-Brett, I Gift You My Angel, oil on canvas, 2025

Place of Birth

London

Education

Royal Drawing School (Art Foundation),
Edinburgh College of Art (Painting Degree),
Tracey Emin Artist Residency

Awards, Accolades

First Class Honours Degree, Royal Scottish
Academy New Contemporaries, TKE
Margate Art Prize

Current exhibitions

Carl Freedman Gallery (solo), TKE Spring
Show (group)

Spiritual Guides, Mentors

Tracey Emin and my friends and family

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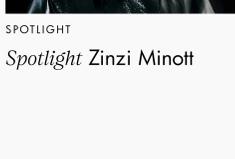
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