



BLAISE DRUMMOND
A History of Hope

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For the painter Blaise Drummond everything starts with photographs. In the case of his new set of paintings “A History of Hope,” that means the photographic archives of Black Mountain College. Drummond is in the habit of seeking out the subjects of his paintings in the history of modernism, icons of which he then transfers into a new setting of harmonious and peaceful natural scenery. Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 as a place for experimentation, not only artistic and pedagogical but also social and political. In many respects the heir of the Bauhaus, it was set up in the remote mountains and forests of North Carolina. Making it an ideal subject for Drummond’s paintings.

Summer 1946, a class photo at Black Mountain: in a joyous, festive atmosphere, Josef and Anni Albers along with Walter and Ilse Gropius pose with their students, and Greek artist Jean Varda perches up a tree in the middle. In *Summer Faculty* (2018), Drummond introduces colour into this famous black-and-white photograph. The white dress of Ilse Gropius now acquires a shimmering Liberty pattern, contrasting with the virginal shirt of the austere Walter, that foe of decorative superfluity. The floral print seems to climb merrily up his wife, like a dream of reconciliation between those historical adversaries functionalism and ornament. Colour is also at the centre of *Colour Class* (2018), a canvas inspired by a photograph from 1940, showing a student absorbed in coloured collages during a course given by Josef Albers. Nearby, Drummond has added tracery of blue wool in a nod to that pioneer of textile art Anni Albers, but also to her husband’s pedagogical method of encouraging students to handle natural materials – witness the dead leaves placed above the young girl. These were gathered in Drummond’s garden in Ireland – the artist likes to integrate genuinely autobiographical elements in his paintings – and also appear in *Seven Leaves for James* (2018). These seven leaves from trees collected by the artist and their pictorial pendant might bring to mind Josef Albers’s *Leaf Studies* (1940–42) and his observation: “You mustn’t think of the autumn as a time of sadness, when winter is coming, because all the trees, they know winter is coming, so they get drunk with colour!”¹ Where, in *Colour Class*,

the colour remains confined to the sheet of paper, following the student's exercise in chromatic interactions, in *Modular* it extends on an architectural scale (2018). Here we are no longer in the black mountains of North Carolina but in Finland; again, though, the starting point for the painting was a photograph, this time one showing an experimental modular house conceived by Kristian Gullichsen and Juhani Pallasmaa in 1969. The grounds of Drummond's paintings are dazzling in their immaculate whiteness, but that is not always the case with the purist architecture that appears within them. In *Modular*, for example, the big bay windows of the wooden house have lost much of their transparency. Flat zones of colour, like Albers' interating colours, cover their surface, making the scene being played out inside the house impenetrable. The opposite is the case in *Experimental House for Marimekko* (2018), which comes as something of a surprise: given the title, one would have expected the house to be covered with a floral motif of the kind that has been the speciality of the eponymous Finnish textile company since the 1960s. But no, what we see is a wooden structure with impeccably rationalist lines standing in a birch forest. In an impertient mood, the painting shows the modernist building amidst the pines and maples, under the flight paths of birds and the gaze of deer. Something subtly subversive has occurred: the painting of modernist architecture turns it into an image, an object of contemplation, going against the grain of its original functionalist credo. Indeed, it rather looks as if no one is ever going to come and live in these deserted places. Sometimes, too, it is not just modernist buildings that get a country airing, but pieces of furniture. In *Study* (2018), a canvas inspired by the photograph of a student's desk at Black Mountain College, a Cesca B32 chair by Marcel Breuer seems to be looking out of the window at Lake Eden. Above the minimalist wooden table, Drummond has covered the wall with coloured wool in a very Albersian composition that warms up the monastic cell.

In *Centaur Costume* (2018) Black Mountain College and the Bauhaus heritage are transported into the world of children's tales, outside that reality where function reigned supreme. The painting shows Robert Rauschenberg dressing a student, Ingeborg Svarc Lauterstein, in a unicorn costume that he has designed for Mardi Gras. This November, Blaise Drummond's "History of Hope" is rekindling the colours of Black Mountain College, as if to remind us that the trees get drunk before winter, reviving the history of the hope embodied by that college tucked away in the woods.

Marjolaine Lévy, November 2018

1. Frederick A. Horowitz and Brenda Danilowitz, *Josef Albers: To Open Eyes*, London and New York, Phaidon, 2006, p. 232