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Oliver Clegg: 'always right, sometimes left.'

*Exploring the Relationship Between the Possible and Impossible*

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by Jody Zellen



Oliver Clegg's large-scale, oil on linen paintings depict scenarios that are surreal, uncanny, and slightly off. The "why" might never be revealed in these works, but the "what" is very present. While devoid of people, Clegg's dramatic paintings are remarkably full of life. In *a leap forward from earlier mechanical systems* (all paintings 2025), an explosion sends a torrent of vintage television sets toward the street from the confines of a store window. In *to weave is to wind*, the trunk of a tree sprouts from the floor, nestled beside a partially-made bed in a cluttered bedroom, bursting upwards into the dark cavity of a ceiling. *Oftentimes I think I have discovered something, I realise a poet has been there before me*, depicts a domestic interior. Streaming into the room from a translucent curtain covering a large window, light illuminates a round dining table and three empty chairs. All is as it should be, except for the fact that the ceiling is a shimmering body of water.

Within these works, Clegg explores the relationship between the possible and the impossible. Tensions develop in this dialectic as viewers contemplate precisely painted representations of absurd scenarios. Clegg creates poetic meditations that touch on contemporary issues ranging from the impact of natural disasters to social inequalities and race relations. In *All we need in life is just a little love to take the pain awayyyyyy*, eight generic chairs (like those found in waiting rooms) float in a blue sky dotted with clouds. What updraft caused them to ascend? And why? As the title suggests, inserting love (or even hope) into everyday situations could help lessen the pain. Clegg's titles direct the interpretation of his paintings and enhance their meanings. *You will find beauty everywhere* is a painting that focuses on the corner of a room filled with bright colorful flowers. The closely cropped scene shows a window adjacent to a muted yellow wall and a gold-framed mirror that reflects it. Yet, the room is subsumed by the expanse of flowers that bombard the otherwise empty space.

Clegg's paintings have a cinematic quality. The images feel familiar, like appropriated scenes from sci-fi or horror films. While it is impossible to pinpoint any particular movie from which they come, the references are abundant. The colorful and brightly lit

passageway in *pieces of the puzzle that i'm always assembling*, suggest a leap into hyperspace that is commonplace. In Clegg's rendition, the portal leads to an image of a natural landscape. Dueling views of the sublime are presented here, as the rendering of the portal and the place it takes us are both magical.

Clegg is a skilled painter whose representational oils blend passages of loose brushwork with more detailed areas to create atmosphere as well as depth within each work. The paintings tell stories that reflect the complexities of modern life, the idea of impending doom, and survival at any cost. That the images are seductive and beautiful contradicts the perils depicted, yet Clegg sees hope and not apocalypse. The images resonate formally as well as conceptually. They defy expectations, evoke a range of emotional responses and remain implanted in one's memory long after viewing.

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