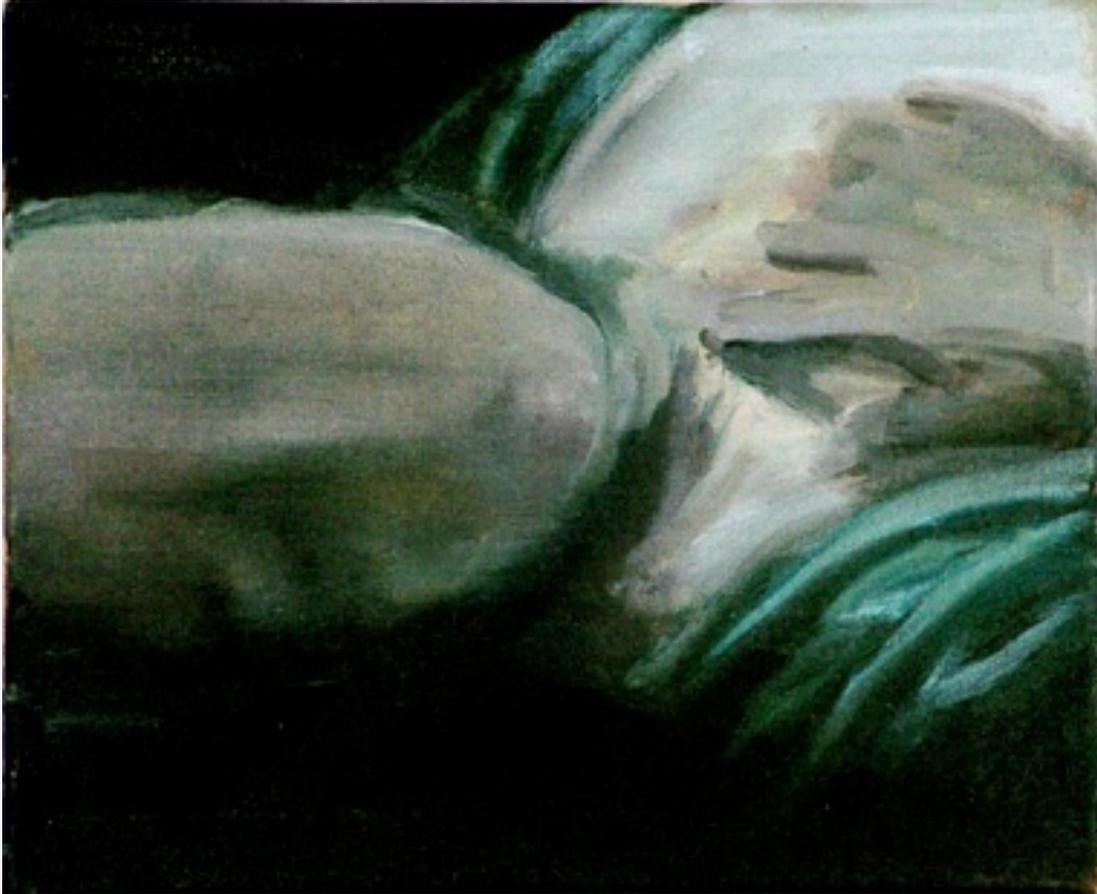


EMANATE REVIEW – CIRCA -Laura McGovern

Ben Readman: *Emanate*, Stone Gallery, Dublin 2, January - March 2008



Ben Readman: *Untitled (No. 8)*, oil on linen; courtesy Stone Gallery.

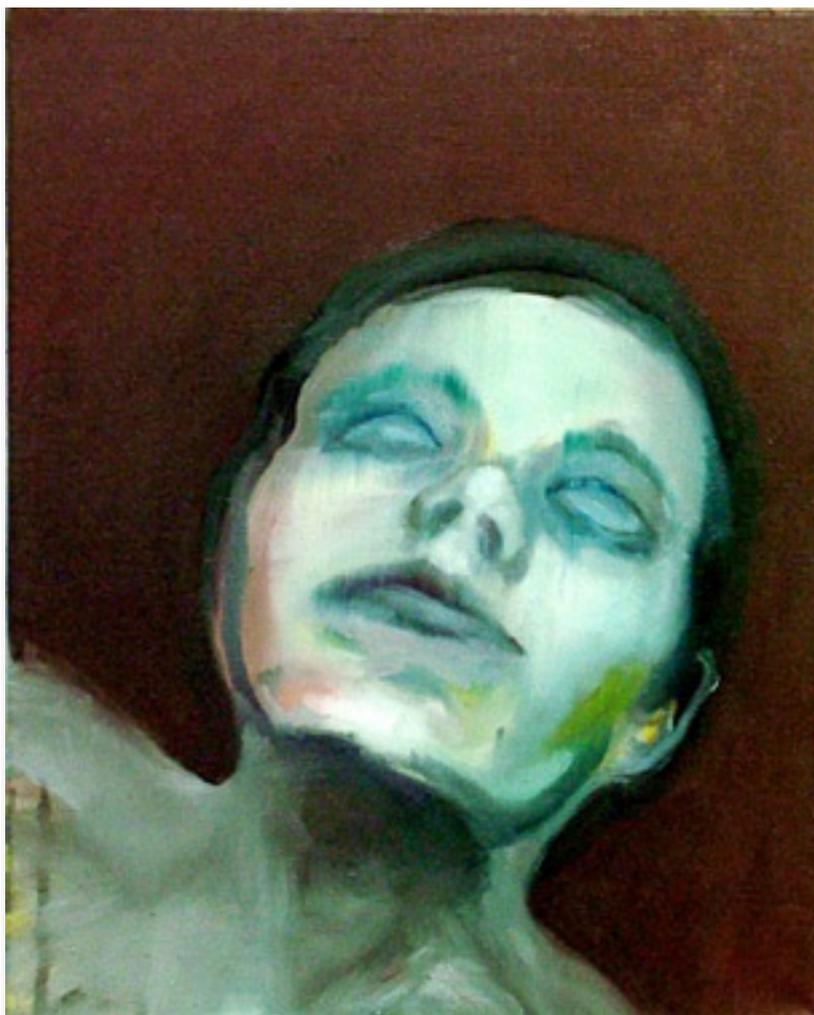
Emanate displays the work of twelve paintings by Dublin-based artist Ben Readman. All paintings are untitled and all are oil on linen with the exception of one (*No.3*) which is oil on canvas. They fill the space well in the Stone Gallery and you are carried easily through from *1* to *12*.

The exhibition takes on the form of seven portraits, four landscapes and one far removed from either (a detail of the glowing embers on a fire). The show's title, *Emanate*, works well as a singular word in describing the exhibition (this too helps when all the works are untitled). Through the depiction of both people (mainly women, with only one being male) and landscape, Readman creates an uneasy sense of foreboding and the images appear to hover in this state. What is suggested is often unclear; this is the intention: the images are carefully balanced in a state of uncertainty, like a suspended moment in time and you are unsure what has preceded or what will follow. These paintings act as vignettes into this world, shrouded in mystery, a mere glimpse that both reels you in and pushes you away at once.



Ben Readman: *Untitled (No. 1)* , oil on linen; courtesy Stone Gallery.

As a whole, the exhibition succeeds in conveying this enigma in its portraits, and while the landscapes possess the intention and their execution cannot be faulted (they are in their own right beautiful images), they appear perhaps too literal. It is the suggestion in the human face and the subsequent interpretation of the emotion within that works so auspiciously in the portraits.



Ben Readman: *Untitled (No. 4)* , oil on linen; courtesy Stone Gallery.

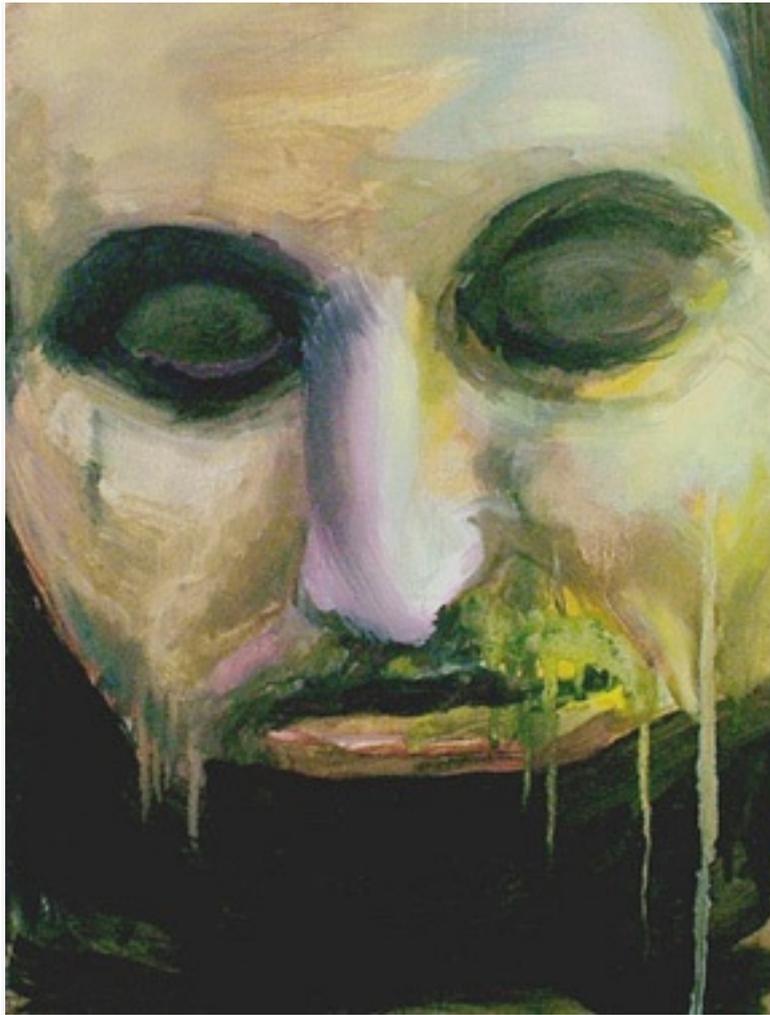
Untitled (No.1) presents us with a female face, head tilted back, eyes closed, lips slightly pursed. There is a calmness to the image, a duality of both rest and frozen activity. Exhibition information informs us that the exhibition "portrays the uneasy relationship between ecstasy, renewal and mortality." [1] This image could be perceived as either a figure on a mortuary table or a woman in a state of climactic ecstasy. The skin is greyed but, in contrast to *Untitled (No.4)*, the warmth of the tone of human skin is apparent. The expression hints towards death but the tone, when compared to others, breathes life.

Untitled (No.4) shows again the female figure. The skin is grey as if drained of all life and blood. It is reminiscent of the death mask of *L'Inconnue de la Seine*. The eyes are either closed or hollowed out, it is difficult to tell which, and the image appears ghostly



Ben Readman: *Untitled (No. 7)* , oil on linen; courtesy Stone Gallery.

Untitled (No.7) depicts the profile of a black-haired woman with green skin. The image is heavily glazed and this results in the appearance of the paint *bleeding* downwards. This piece encapsulates the three elements of the exhibition: ecstasy, renewal and mortality. Further reading of the image might draw in the Egyptian god of life, death and fertility, Osiris, who was depicted with a green face; subsequently, the colour went on to symbolize fertility and rebirth. During other periods it was also seen to represent love and the desires of man. The parted lips of *Untitled (No.7)* suggest it is perhaps the latter that is being represented here, but other elements suggest the former. The beauty of *Emanate* lies in its ability to present us with the duality of the conflicting moments of life, where pure pleasure is experienced and, at the same instant, where life has expired. The sense of the erotic in *Untitled (No.7)* is blurred and it jars with the sense of death; the combination of the two creates an eerie reading of the piece.



Ben Readman: *Untitled (No. 10)* , oil on linen;
courtesy Stone Gallery.

The only male representation appears in *Untitled (No.10)* . The hollow eyes are again present, but in a far more sinister sense than earlier, as it appears this man lives. His face takes up the entire surface of the canvas and the hanging height means he looks directly at you. He appears to melt off the canvas; the travelling paint forms whiskers on his face and further heightens the melancholic mood. The paint is not heavily applied and the skin often gives way to small areas of unpainted canvas.



Ben Readman: *Untitled (No. 2)* , oil on linen; courtesy Stone Gallery.

Dotted between the figurative paintings are the landscapes. Three of these depict the rising sun and its effect on the land- and cloud-scapes, *Untitled (No.2)* focuses on the hot yellow sun as it cast a golden, brown glow on the surrounding clouds. *Untitled (No.6)* performs like *Untitled (No.2)* ; it depicts a silhouetted mountain top, with a lush blue morning sky heavy with grey clouds. These images play on the transitory moment between one state of being and the next. *Untitled (No.9)*, though, does this in a far too literal manner and the resulting image jars with the ambiguity of the other pieces. Three trees are shown (the composition of which does not aid the image); two are laden with the golden leaves of autumn whilst one, an evergreen, still maintains its year-long greenery.

Karl Him performing at the Stone Gallery, photo by: Bohoe

As part of *Emanate* at the Stone Gallery, there was a one-off performance by artist/musician Karl Him (Karl Burke, 'Him' being the name used when performing as a musician) inspired by the work of Readman. The half-hour set comprised of Burke, his guitar and a Loop Station guitar pedal. Various implements were used to play the guitar: a bow, stones and pebbles of varying sizes, and also a paintbrush pushed behind the strings to lighten the pitch of the guitar. The first fifteen minutes appeared to respond directly to individual images, beginning with *Untitled (No.8)*. Burke responds by playing a haunting, almost dream-like interpretation of it, capturing the uneasy tranquility and ambiguity of the piece. Moving on to *Untitled (No.9)*(the landscape with the trees), the tone and atmosphere shifts slightly and the wind blowing through the leaves is evoked. In a sudden shift, the music becomes darker, creepy and sinister, and the forboding character of *Untitled (No.10)* is summoned forth. After that the music appears to blend in and out between these elements; the overall result is impressive.

