

All
Systems
Tend
Toward
Disorder

The Garden Paintings

Michael Greaves

February 2026

This publication accompanies the dual exhibitions in Dunedin of Michael Greaves' recent works, The Garden Paintings. The two exhibitions, at Olga Gallery and The Dunedin School of Art present works made in 2025 and early 2026, accompanied by text written graciously by Kari Schmidt.

Olga Gallery Dunedin. 13th February - 14th March. Opening Friday 13th February 2026

Dunedin School of Art Gallery. 20-28th February 2026.

Finissage Friday 27th February 2026

Tending Towards Wildness: The Garden Paintings

Michael's garden paintings instantly beguile. The colours and textures of his brushstrokes immediately recall the botanical variety of semi-wild but undoubtedly organised gardens.

Greaves came across this style of painting out of necessity. The artist has sustained permanent nerve damage in his right arm and hand as a result of corrective surgery following an accident. Hence the lovely dabbling of small paint marks to represent a multiplicity of blossoms. Their colour and variety are undoubtedly celebrations of nature and beauty, an affirmation of life and its botanical pleasures.

But something more sinister also lurks beneath. We experience the prettiness of gardens and yet these landscapes - with their artificially luminous skies and crowded foregrounds - are almost suffocating.

These scenes are not simply a representation of reality but something out of the dream-cape. When we come closer, the works have an abstracted quality, dissolving into a plane of colours and textures. The apocalyptic skies and foreboding trees, the claustrophobic pulsing of plants, suggest an anxious almost overwrought state of mind. Thus, these works imply an understanding of the fragility of life, chance and the fact that everything can change in an instant - just like the weather can turn.

Symbols are littered throughout these paintings like clues. The red and orange-pink flowers seem almost wound-like. And with any wound there is pain but also an opening, en route to a different understanding. Topiared hedges and flowery bushes stand in for gendered anatomies. And we see tall poplar trees littered throughout,

referencing a (male) individual. The artist has also played with the convention of 'the fold' in a number of these works, signalling an interest in the hidden and how images can open and close. And indeed these works seem to fold in on themselves, merging genres from abstract and figurative painting, to landscape and self-portrait.

In attempting to impose order on our gardens, we also hide histories and legacies. There is an undeniable violence underlying this bucolic ideal. We live during a time when the garden can no longer be experienced as a neutral Arcadia. There is always also a question of power and loss, compromise and complicity, fragility and extinction.

Conversely, gardens can and do exist for the public good and can be a means of nurturing our environment. They are also sites of great care, tenderness and attention. Anyone who has ever had a garden knows how much work it is to maintain. It is a constant effort to pull the weeds, grow the annuals, tame the hedges and mow the lawns. Gardens are constantly pushing back at our attempts to control them, almost yearning to return to their original state of wildness.

Something similar could be said for human psychology. There are endless rules, spoken and unspoken, we are expected to follow - in the ways we dress, speak, work, write, love and even dream. We follow these rules for many reasons - to fulfil our part in the social contract and for our own sense of peace, stability and order. But secretly, there's a part of us that is like the garden - longing for disorder, tending towards wildness.

Kari Schmidt



Zero Doubt
66 x 66cm
Oil on linen
2026



All Systems Tend Toward Disorder
150 x 130cm
Oil on canvas
2025



Chance and its Unexpected Gifts
66 x 66cm
Oil on linen
2026

What emerges is not landscape, but consciousness itself: a record of our attempts to hold still the passing flow of time. In these shifting, luminous fields, Greaves reveals that beauty is never fixed, it is what flickers, momentarily, before disorder resumes.

James Leigh Van Roche. 2025.



A Kind of Cognitive Realism
66 x 66cm
Oil on linen
2025



Separation Anxiety
56 x 61cm
Oil on canvas
2025



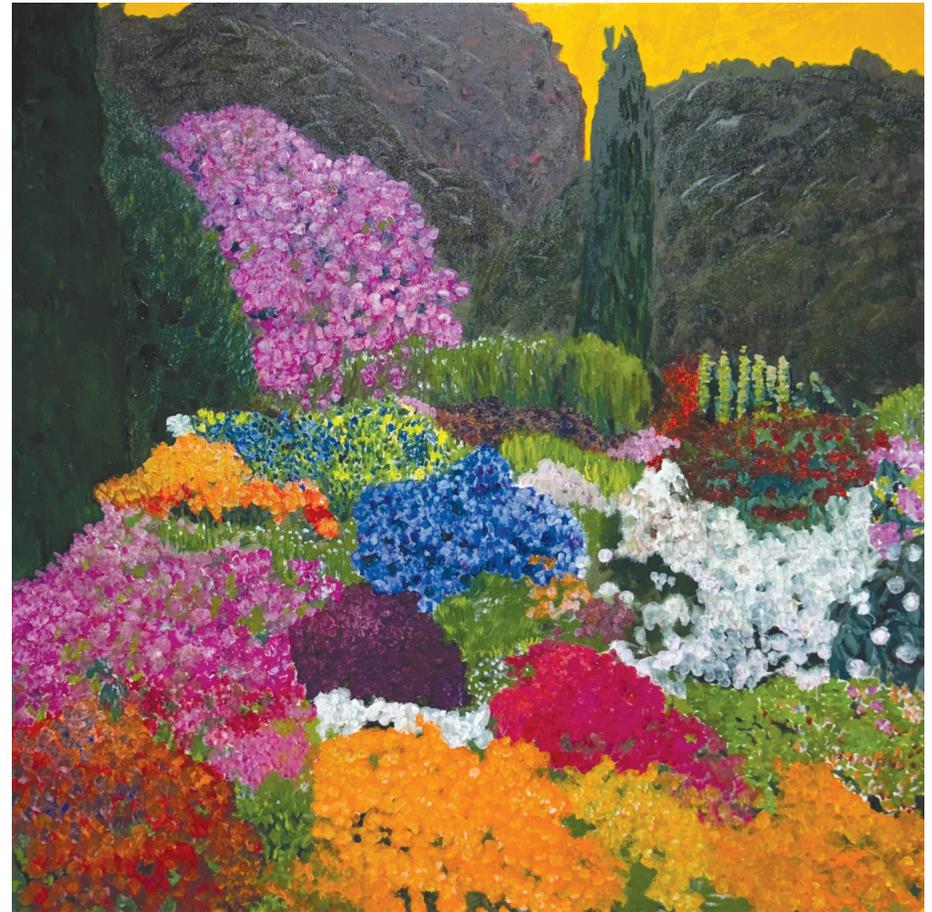
How Perception Fails, Mutates, or Misfires
56 x 56cm
Oil on linen
2025



A Serious, but Soft Encounter
56 x 56cm
Oil on linen
2025



It's the Idle Hours that Lead Us to Ruin
66 x 66cm
Oil on linen
2025



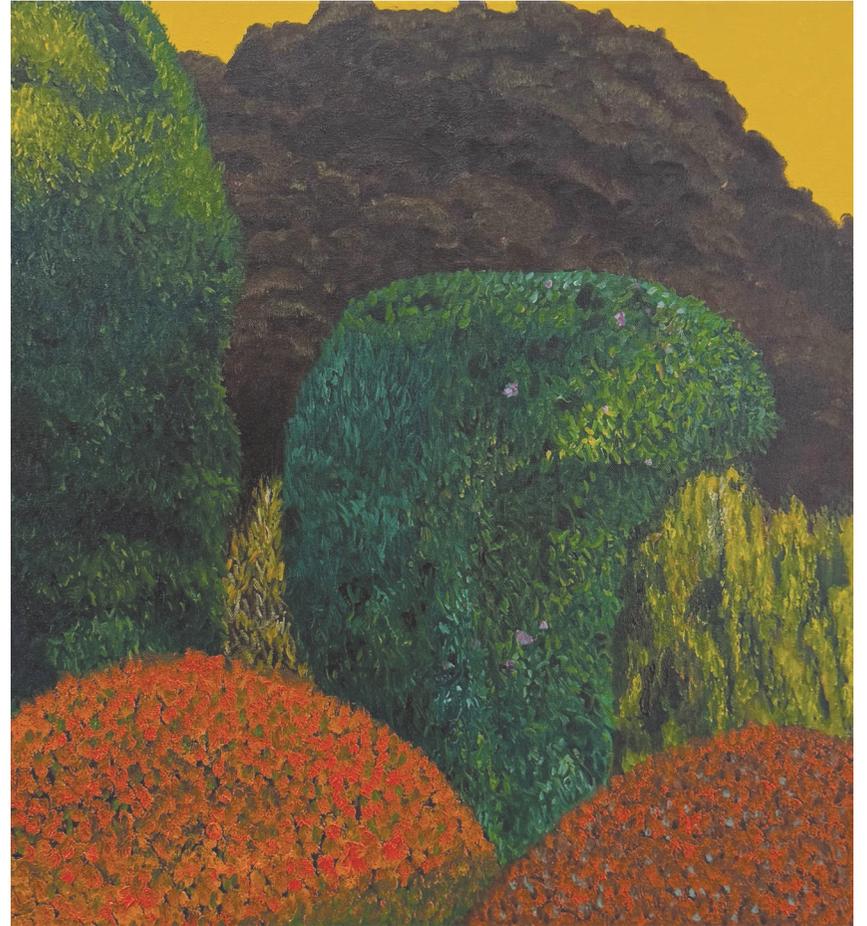
The Impossibility of Seeing Everything at Once
106 x 106cm
Oil on linen
2025



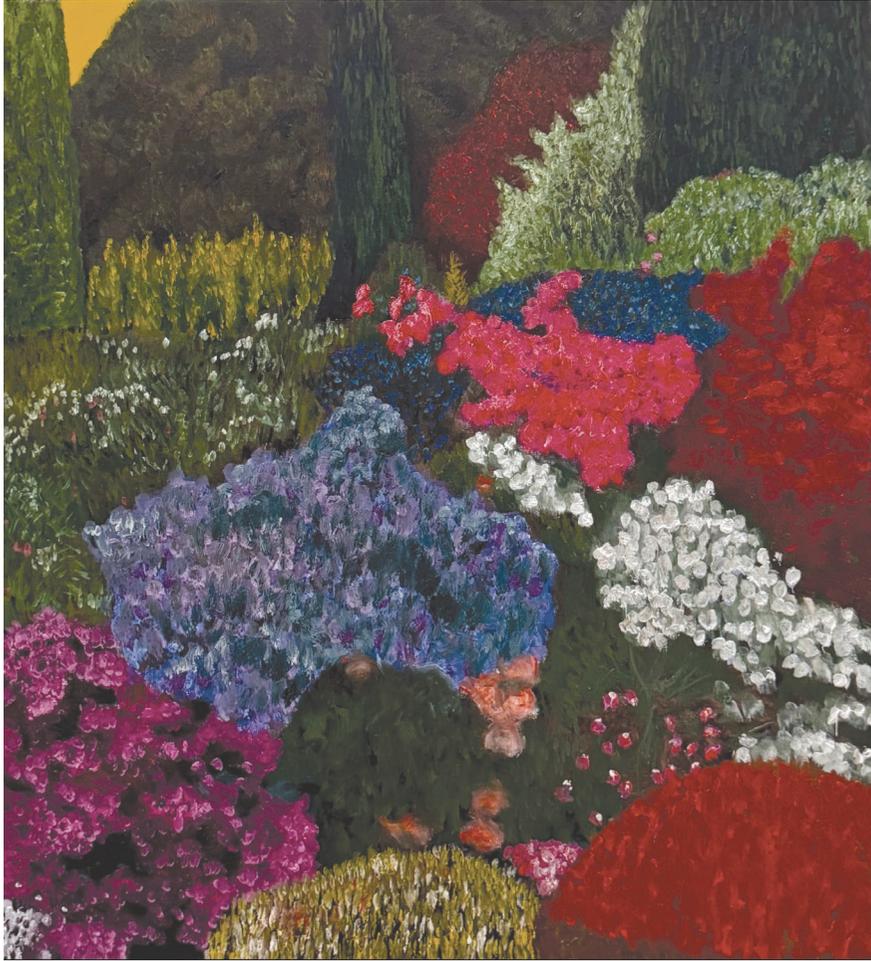
Not and Average Garden, A Portrait
Oil on canvas
2025



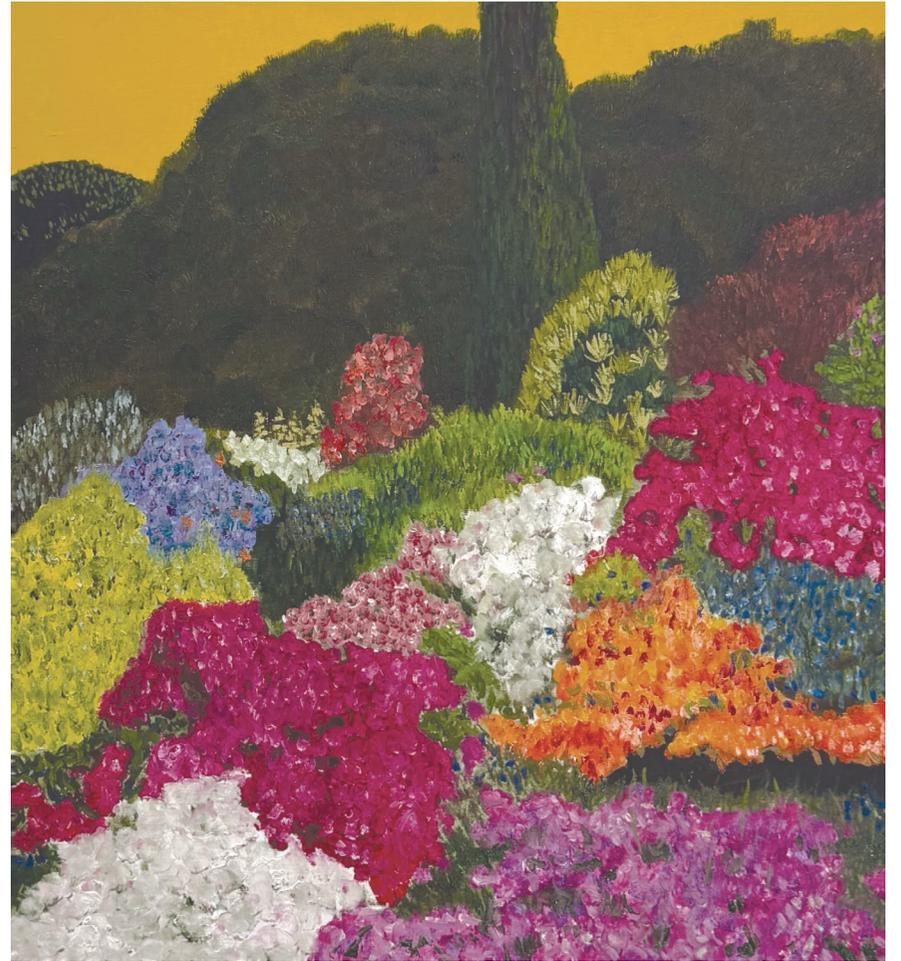
Forcing an Encounter with the Gaps Between Perception
61 x 56cm
Oil on canvas
2025



Everything is Autobiographical, and Everything is a Portrait
Portrait
56 x 61cm
Oil on canvas
2025



My Idle Mind
56 x 61 cm
Oil on linen
2025



Towards a New Romantic Den, and Cave
56 x 61 cm
Oil on linen
2025



Interior Fold #1
83 x 66cm
Oil on canvas
2025



Perception is Never Objective
56 x 61cm
Oil on canvas
2025



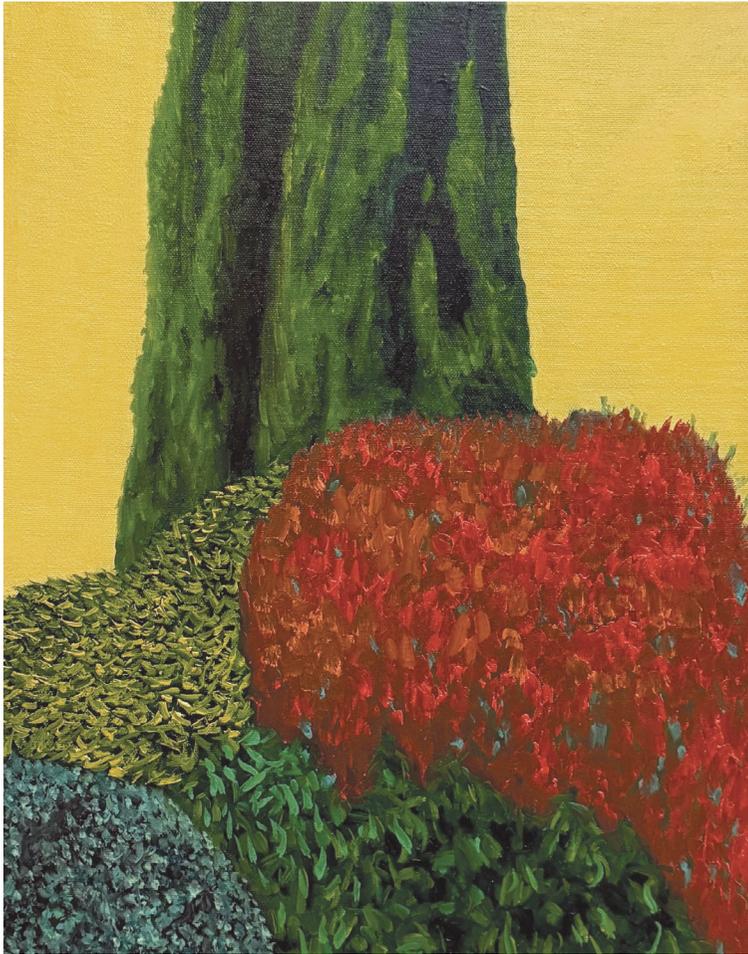
First Fold (Tomahawk)
56 x 61cm
Oil on canvas
2025



The Deceiving Appearances of the World
45.5 x 45.5cm
Oil on canvas
2025



Fragment Veils
40.5 x 45.5cm
Oil on canvas
2025



A Young Family
36.5 x 45.5cm
Oil on canvas
2025



Fragment Veils
40.5 x 45.5cm
Oil on canvas
2025

All Systems Tend Toward Disorder : The Garden Paintings (Pt 1 and 2)

Michael Greaves.

Text: Kari Schmidt

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Dunedin New Zealand

Director: Justin Spiers

And

Pt 2 at The Dunedin School of Art Gallery - 20th - 28th February 2026

Otago Polytechnic

19 Riego Street

Dunedin New Zealand

Director: Thomas Lord

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