

GEORGE SHAW This is not conceptual painting. This is not the kind of art you learn at art school and build theories around. When George Shaw finished art school in 1989 he felt so artistically out of touch that he abandoned art altogether, working as a special-needs teacher before returning to art seven years later. "An unhealthy cocktail of embarrassment or indecision," says Shaw, meant that "for a long time I could never make the work I really wanted to make." Returning to art and enrolling at London's Royal College of Art in 1996, Shaw came to create a series of extremely personal works: small landscape paintings of his postwar-constructed hometown of Tile Hill, Coventry. Painted on small boards in an easel-type size that can be worked on comfortably at the kitchen or bedroom table, maybe in front of the TV, they are painted in Humbrol enamel paint, the hobby paints favored by teens. Out of step with the predominant 1990s moods of Brit Pop hysteria or postconceptual theory, these are quiet, evocative paintings that create a subtle autobiography. 000 In 1999 Shaw was among the prizewinners for the prestigious John Moores painting award with the beautiful *Hometown*, part of a series of paintings collectively titled "The Passion." Reworked from photographs, these are pictures of unforgettable forgettable places, where the newly built housing estate of his youth merges unsteadily with the surrounding woods. Parking lots, vandalized garages, a concrete underpass, muddy shortcuts, semirural lots behind shops or next to the pub are emptied of people, cars, satellite dishes, and street signs—everything that might detract from the idealization of this disappointing landscape. The paintings are potently atmospheric; the overcast sky, the damp smell of the leaves, and the echo of an unseen foghorn all invisibly contribute as much to the work as the layers of resins that recall the Pre-Raphaelites and make the surface so rich and mesmerizing. These are the pictures of every hometown as we remember them from early youth, when we began to wander out of doors by ourselves, becoming aware of the surroundings we'd taken for granted until then. They are the memory of gaining our first sense of where we were from and beginning to judge it, deciding whether our surrounds were admirable, adequate, or despicable—an awareness that most likely emerged at the very moment we realized we were soon going to leave this place, probably forever. 000 Shaw's works are simple yet contradictory, both idealizing and criticizing the places depicted. They are a mix of "the workmanlike and the visionary," as Pre-Raphaelite painting was once described, just as Shaw himself is part pub dweller and part poet, like so many figures in British art and literature, from Wilde to Joyce to D.H. Lawrence. The painting technique itself conjures up its own contradictions. The model paint is excellent for rendering white window trims and thin branches of winter trees, but the piles of fallen leaves have the improbable, overdetailed look of an earnest entry to a local art competition. 000 Shaw captures the moment after the rain has stopped, when all the children have gone home. It's getting dark, and we're mistakenly alone. A routine place becomes unexpectedly meaningful, and still. "I paint the paintings of all the times and all the thoughts I lack the language to describe," notes Shaw. "For the one single moment I can recall, I feel a dull sadness for the thousands I have forgotten." 000 Gilda Williams

Born in Coventry (United Kingdom) in 1966, lives and works in Nottingham (United Kingdom) Selected One Person Exhibitions: 2003 – Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, United Kingdom 000 2001 – "The New Life", Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London 000 2000 – "Morrissey vs Francis Bacon", Nunnery Gallery, London; "The Land of Nod" (with John Strutton), Lift Gallery, London 000 1999 – "Of Innocence: Scenes from The Passion", Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London 000 1998 – "God Only Knows", Hockney Gallery, Royal College of Art, London 000 1992 – Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, United Kingdom Selected Group Exhibitions: 2003 – Tate Triennial, Tate Britain, London 000 2001 – "Fear It Do It Anyway", Vilma Gold, London 000 2000 – "Haunted by Happiness", Jerwood Gallery, London; "As It Is", Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, United Kingdom; "Public Culture Private Nature", Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv 000 1999 – "Surveying the Landscape", Lombard-Freid Fine Arts, New York; "John Moores 21", Walker Museum, Liverpool, United Kingdom; "Pictures of Pictures", Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, United Kingdom 000 1998 – "A-Z", The Approach, London

1. *Scenes from the Passion: Christmas Eve*, 1998, Humbrol enamel on board, 17 x 21 inches, 43 x 53 cm
2. *Scenes from the Passion: The Evening*, 2001, Humbrol enamel on board, 17 x 21 inches, 43 x 53 cm
3. *Scenes from the Passion: The Path to Pepys Corner*, 2001, Humbrol enamel on board, 17 x 21 inches, 43 x 53 cm
4. *Scenes from the Passion: The Fall*, 1999, Humbrol enamel on board, 29 1/2 x 39 1/2 inches, 75 x 100 cm
5. *Scenes from the Passion: Hometown*, 1999, Humbrol enamel on board, 29 1/2 x 39 1/2 inches, 75 x 100 cm

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