

David Murphy, *Affinities*

Text by Ingrid Swenson

Affinities is the title that Murphy has chosen for his exhibition of new paintings at Lyndsey Ingram. It is a term that suggests the possibility of implicit connections between ideas, objects and sensibilities. Murphy has said that his work “resides at the point where human action or activity meets the natural world”, and that “it takes inspiration from architecture, anthropology, tool-making, textiles – a whole range of different activities performed on different materials for different purposes.” Working across painting, drawing, sculpture, and large public projects, and employing a range of materials and processes, Murphy talks about having a ‘whole practice’. Moreover, it is a practice which has, in all its various forms, a fundamental relation to the manner and production of textiles; “At the root of everything is the line, the thread, the filament... Almost everything I make can be characterised in this way. It is the driving force behind the work.”

Three new paintings *Blanket (Pieced)* are installed opposite the gallery entrance. These works are testament to Murphy’s distinct language of painting that he has evolved over the past 20 years, which involves the methodical application of chalky casein paint in rich earthy or restrained mineral colours using a brush. Over this matte, richly opaque surface, and guided by a wooden ruler, Murphy etches numerous repeated lines through the paint to reveal the white ground beneath. This meticulous process creates an overlaid surface pattern that has an effect akin to a film – or what Murphy describes as a ‘veil’ – of gossamer like scratches that lift the colour below. These etched lines enliven and animate the work to transform colour into something seductive, fleeting and luminous. Murphy has composed these works using square and curved gesso panels arranged into a grid of individual elements. The panel edges have been gently smoothed off, so where the paint colour neatly ends and the white ground begins, an indented seam or furrow is created. Elegant diamond or triangular-shaped voids emerge between the curved elements of the panels to reveal the recessed wall behind. These works tease at the threshold between painting and sculpture and disrupt the distinction between two and three dimensions. Also, crucially, because they comprise many individual parts, they allow the artist to produce his work at a much larger scale than can be achieved with single-panel painting.

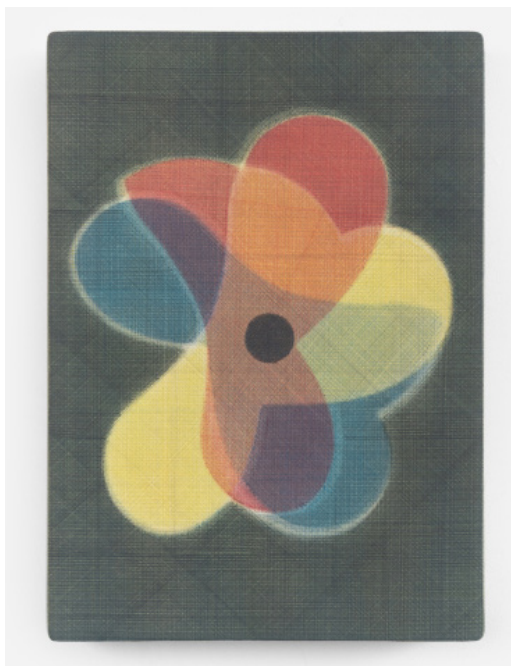
The potential for these works to physically and exponentially grow is a particularly liberating prospect for Murphy and directly connects his studio practice with his public projects. An example of this a new low relief sculpture currently being completed for a development in Manchester. Titled *Meander*, and measuring thirty-five meters high, the work has been conceived to bring ‘everyday pleasure to the place’ by engaging with the historical and architectural context of this urban space, as well as the natural environment of the river Medlock that runs through it. Murphy has mentioned how Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) whose practice straddled and blurred the connection between art, design and architecture has been an important touchstone for thinking about the potential for a truly social art, which includes all aspects of his practice. Noguchi uses the phrase ‘new nature’ to suggest that urban spaces, created and built with industrial materials like concrete and steel, are not unnatural spaces. Murphy has adopted this notion in social practice “to mean that that this ‘new nature’ can be created from anything, and that it manifests through sensibility, care and creativity, rather than any specific material.”

The other wall surfaces of the Grade II listed gallery space are covered in glazed bricks, decorated textured tiling, and wood panelling. The slightly pitched floor with herringbone patterned brickwork provides an indication of its original use as stable and garage, and remains a key feature that cannot be altered or defaced. Murphy is keen for his work to share the space with its environment, and welcomes the convergence of the domestic, agricultural or industrial into what is usually a neutral gallery setting. A large single-panel monochrome work, *Blanket (Veiled)*, (2026) hangs framed through a doorway. This work continues his series of paintings which began in 2019 and explores the language of textile through repetition, interconnection and the layering of brushstrokes and line. Murphy’s fluid yet highly controlled horizontal and vertical brushstrokes form an open lattice of marks punctuated by wave-like swoops. By ‘veiling’ the work with the etched lines, he has further moderated the impact of his palette of black and white to offer a calming across different material, process and scale, it is important to note that the title – *Blanket* – was first used for his large sculpture commission for the courtyard of The Piece Hall in Halifax (2019). Constructed – or rather woven – from gently rolled lengths of steel tubing and held by steel rings, this work resonated immediately with the building’s original industrial and mercantile function as a major trading centre for cloth. Once again, the potential for an artwork to become an intrinsic part of its social space and context is at the heart of Murphy’s practice.

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Lyndsey Ingram
20 Bourdon Street
London W1K 3PL

T. +44 (0)20 7629 8849
E. info@lyndseyingram.com
W. lyndseyingram.com



Soft Grip, 2026, Casein paint on gesso panel, 30 x 21.5 cm



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Long Ending is the title given to a corresponding series of paintings that Murphy has developed over recent years. Again, multiple rows of lines are meticulously scratched through the casein paint but for these works, he deliberately creates ridges and troughs across the picture plane rather a rippling veil. *Long Ending (Dawn Fade)* (2026) has an immediate rhythmic quality bringing to mind a range of associations from soundwaves to desert landscapes. The painted surface is a rich pink blush, which gradually darkens to a deep inky blue towards the bottom of the work. This intensifies the impression of a land, sea or skyscape, but also proposes a kind of filmic quality, as the title might suggest. There is a languorous nature to these paintings, where the artist clearly takes pleasure in exploring how subtle and incremental shifts in register of colour and line affect mood and tone. Murphy has commented how he aligns his practice with an interest in certain forms of music such as Philip Glass's Minimalist compositions or JS Bach's Baroque *Goldberg Variations* (1741), and how they are able to explore an infinite range of melody through repetition and changes in harmony and rhythm. The *Long Ending* works also prompt a discussion about the serene minimalist paintings of Agnes Martin. Her delicately drawn pencil lines and pale washes of colour take on a quiet but emphatic power, and although entirely abstract, they remain resolutely fixed in her emotional connection to the natural world. This is borne out by her titling of her works such as *Desert Rain* (1957) *White Flower* (1960), *Night Sea* (1963), *The Harvest* (1965), and many others.

In conjunction with his trademark brushwork, Murphy exchanges the scratched line for freely formed shaped templates to produce his recent series of paintings, *Soft Grip*. Rotating both the negative and positive stencil components from their central axis, Murphy adds colour to each part of the process, exposing or obscuring parts of the surface beneath to blend or block out areas of paint. A 'halo' effect is serendipitously created by the brushwork when it passes over the 1mm thick cardboard stencil onto the panel, leaving an unpainted or just faintly coloured glowing silhouette. This process requires methodical and precise execution, and the result is both graceful and elegant. Murphy has suggested that one of the references for this work are images by artist Rob Kessler of microscopic pollen and seeds taken with a scanning electron microscope. Murphy isn't proposing that we read these works with the thought of microscopy in mind but enjoys the possibility of viewing them with an open sense of the push and pull of scale and perception.

Murphy's studio practice shares qualities with the work of a scientist or a cartographer. He is curious about how we observe, explore and navigate the natural world and enjoys the possibility of viewing our universe from micro and macro perspectives – citing Charles and Ray Eames' film *Powers of Ten* (1977) as making a significant early impression on him. Developing several bodies of work at any one time, his studio practice becomes a kind of imaginative mapping exercise where one strand of enquiry feeds into and informs his thinking about another. Graduating from Glasgow School of Art in 2006, at a time when many artists' work was engaging with new technologies, Murphy honed a practice that has put making and process at its core. Over the past 20 years, we have seen artists increasingly drawn to reconnect with material and the haptic, and also art's ability to meaningfully inhabit a social space. David Murphy's work is at the forefront of these concepts, combining both the handmade and the use of industrial processes with an acute sense of the intersection or affinities between nature, science and creativity.

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David Murphy: *Affinities* is open to the public at Lyndsey Ingram, 16 Bourdon Street, London W1K 3PH every Monday to Friday between the 10 September – 7 October 2026 from 10am until 6pm.

For any further information please contact info@lyndseyingram.com or call +44 (0) 207 629 8849.