

Topping, Jane (2007) Residency: Jane Topping (interview in Map Magazine).  
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able to identify what circumstances are conducive to making work and what prevents me from working well. I have had the time and space to, for instance, read all day. Or to jump on a train to see a particular exhibition or collection. Most importantly, I have had the opportunity to relax and experiment with the work and that is just essential.

**SC** Do you think you will approach the way you work differently when you get back to the UK?

**JT** Well, I'm already thinking of strategies to make sure I keep working in the way I have enjoyed here. Practical things such as staying later in the studio or getting up a little earlier in the morning so that there is some thinking time before the day begins. It's important for me to retain the ability to play in the studio, to remain fluid in my attitude towards perceived deadlines and to avoid self-imposed pressures. Whether I am making in the studio or reading, watching a film or taking a walk even, all these things are needed. They all feed into the work and it's important to keep hold of that.

**SC** Your new work seems to be different from pieces I saw in your solo show at GOMA and earlier shows at Generator and the art school in Dundee. Has there been a conscious departure from any of your established methods of working?

**JT** I haven't consciously tried to alter my practice, but it has evolved since I've been here. Simply being able to spend uninterrupted time with the work – experimenting, making mistakes and enjoying it – has had a huge impact on the way it has developed. I have spent some time identifying previously successful elements and then pushing them. There has also been time to try out new materials and techniques, to take risks that perhaps I wouldn't have taken had I not removed myself from my usual environment. I'm still working within my own particular language, but I'm more mindful not to impose restraints on myself.

**SC** One thing that seems quite different in your new work is there is little or no text. A lot of your earlier pieces toyed with semantics and text/image association.

**JT** I have used text consistently for a few years now, to varying degrees of success I think, but being in a new environment has allowed me to try new ways of working – that has sidelined the textual element so now it is just one of my tools. I think of text as being one element of a personal lexicon, which has expanded to include painting, collage and photography as well. I'm using all these elements to achieve the same goal – to create tension, to create space between disparate pictorial elements so that there is a kind of slippage present in an individual piece. But much of my inspiration still comes from textual sources – I continue to be interested in how a narrative structure can relate to a visual experience.

**SC** Association and a layered approach to creating works has always been important to you. How has moving to somewhere unfamiliar affected your bearings in this respect?

**JT** I'm still using a 'layered approach' as you say, but my starting points are more varied than in the past. Working in a new country can't help but open you up so that you are more receptive to new experiences than before. I've found that my inspiration can come from quite unexpected places. For instance, seeing 'Victory Boogie Woogie' at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag had quite an impact on my work. Also Margaret Atwood's essays on fiction writing, an installation of J.C.J. van der Heyden's work, David Lynch's *Inland Empire* – all these have influenced me recently. The associations you make when you allow things to creep up on you can be surprising.

**SC** So, what else have you been doing in Amsterdam for the past ten months?

**JT** Initially I spent a couple of months getting to know where I was living – travelling a little, seeing as many exhibitions as I could, trying (pretty

## RESIDENCY JANE TOPPING

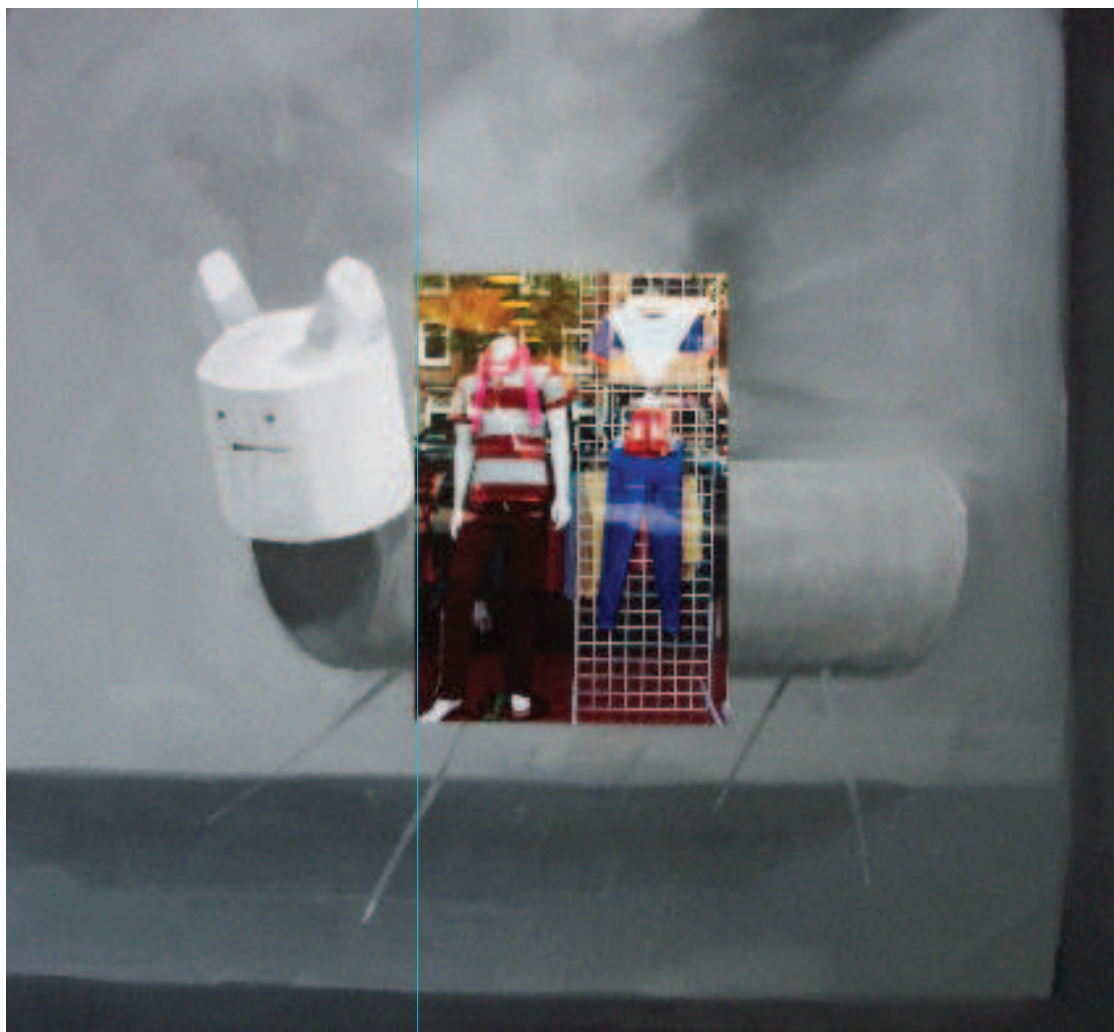
*Steven Cairns talks to Glasgow artist Jane Topping, currently on a year long Scottish Arts Council residency in Amsterdam*

**Steven Cairns** You've been in Amsterdam since February. Looking back, how did you prepare yourself for the move?

**Jane Topping** This residency is such a unique opportunity, it can be tailored by the artist according to their individual requirements. So before I applied, I sat down and identified what it was that I would like to gain from moving to Amsterdam. I thought of the things I'd like to examine and concentrate on within my own practice; things I would like to change about how I work and things I was currently happy with and would like to develop. In the end, even before I arrived, I had a clear idea of what I wanted from this residency and what I wanted to achieve from it.

**SC** How does living in Amsterdam as an artist compare with working in Glasgow?

**JT** There is really no comparison. I'd been working in Glasgow, pretty much in the same studio, for the eight years since I left art school and I was ready for a change. The beauty of this residency is that it provides complete freedom. Freedom from financial restraints, freedom from the day to day grind of balancing studio time with other commitments. Here, I have been able to live in my studio with the work and that has been a revelation. I have been



**Left:** Jane Topping, 'Untitled', 2007, oil and photograph on board

unsuccessfully) to learn a bit of the language and so on. I also joined a reading group lead by Annie Fletcher and Frederique Bergholtz at De Appel and that enabled me to meet with local artists and curators. Then I spent some concentrated time experimenting in the studio, trying things out – practising really. Making a lot of mistakes, but enjoying them. I also spent a good deal of time walking around with my camera. Some exciting pieces of work emerged around this time. In the past few months I've been spending more time on single pieces of work but making sure that there is still a sense of risk taking in the studio. The work has been developing quite naturally into groups which seem to make sense together.

**SC** How do you feel your work has progressed?

**JT** Well, I'm a more accomplished painter than I was ten months ago – that's just down to some hard graft with the materials. And because I have been feeling more free in the studio, more open to experimentation, the work has become more ambiguous I think, it feels less 'sewn up'. I think I've come to a closer understanding of what works and what doesn't – and that you can make your own rules to define this. For instance, one of the most successful pieces I've made recently came after working on a painting for a couple of weeks. Every day it seemed to be further

away from where I wanted it to be. I was working late one night thinking 'This just can't get any worse'. Then, within half an hour, it was there. That was a really important lesson about progress. Without solid studio time, that painting wouldn't have happened.

**SC** What are you working on just now?

**JT** Right now I'm working on some larger oils on canvas, very loosely based on some photographs of windows I've been taking recently. When I first arrived I was intrigued by the lack of curtains

or blinds in the Amsterdammers' windows. Often you can look straight into brightly lit rooms to see a family eating dinner or someone lying watching the television – like watching a play unfold. Other people make specific objects to put in their windows – small sculpture or signs. I thought that this was an interesting manifestation, not just of the Dutch psyche, but of the general way an individual wants to be understood by the world. The Dutch are a friendly but reserved lot, and yet they want to be seen and make active decisions about how they will be perceived by onlookers. I'm interested by these discrepancies between a personal and a public life and it is a subject I often return to. So this recent work invites and deprives simultaneously, creates a kind of push/pull tension, where the work is really analogous to the window.

**SC** Has being on residency made you think about how your practice and ambitions have developed?

**JT** I've always been ambitious for the work and am excited about the direction it is taking right now. But more importantly, I think I'm better able to implement strategies that will push my practice forward when I return to Glasgow – to keep open in the studio, to keep prodding in awkward directions and to keep my emphasis on process rather than outcome. You have to allow events to change you and change your work – these are the things I want to hold onto when I get home. And then I'll just see what happens.

*Steven Cairns is assistant editor of MAP*