

## THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD

**M**y recent body of work, *The Centre Cannot Hold*, began with a need to respond to current global economic, social and ecological instability. This brought me to question how, as a civilisation, we continue to exploit all walks of life, devastating our own ecosystem to a staggering degree, and to ask why this seems such a hard habit to kick.

Driven by profit or simply preoccupied with our own comforts, we all become complicit in financially motivated wars, exploding oil rigs and melting ice caps. I wanted to investigate the things keeping contemporary western culture on this trajectory and start joining the dots between the headlines and daily life.

Working primarily in paint and print, I draw from my personal snapshots of day-to-day life and images found in the media. I work collaboratively with my materials, responding to the accidental and alchemical as the work evolves. I love the uncertainty of oil paint – although I've been painting for years, it remains a very unpredictable and mysterious process for me. I am drawn to the gritty and corrosive nature of etching and find it contributes to the sense of degeneration and undoing in the imagery I am working with.

Deserted parks, unhinged carousels and bleak industrial landscapes present impressions of a fading 'American Dream', and images of riots, warfare and tar sands respond to the increasingly urgent call of a planet on fire. In *Rearranging the stripes* 2011 (oil on canvas, 45 x 45cm) a gathering of empty deckchairs flap in the wind on a backdrop of a dissolving forest – it could be the end of the day or the end of an era. In *Whoever dies with the most toys wins* 2011 (oil on canvas, 30 x 50cm), Wall Street is rendered in overly thinned monochrome paint and evokes a deserted and flimsy fairground. A black and orange explosion fills the canvas in *Business as usual* 2011 (oil on linen, 62 x 57cm), where a tiny dinghy of oil rig rescue workers looks on from the side.

While each of these images can be read individually, the interrelationships between them and the broader narrative are important to me and typically my work is displayed in clusters of 10 to 50 pieces. In *Clusterfuck* 2011, a suite of 24 etchings is composed in a collage, where a military tank finds itself next to an ice rink and a dead bird.

At times I question my motivations and if there is any good reason for bringing more into an already saturated world – only to reflect back what bombards us through the media 24/7: a civilization and ecology in pieces. Yet in spite of this onslaught, collectively we seem to have failed to notice, or failed to act. So perhaps there is still value in acknowledging, responding and bearing witness to what is happening; to bring consciousness to a moment in time where, even though there is so much at stake, it's still too easy to go back to sleep.

*Born in South Africa, Tamsin Relly relocated to London in 2009, and completed a Masters in Fine Art at City and Guilds of London Art School in 2011. She currently works from her studio in Southwark. View an installation of her paintings at ASC Window Space. 128 Blackfriars Road SE1 8EQ from November 6th – December 3rd: [www.tamsinrelly.com](http://www.tamsinrelly.com)*

**Top:** *Swing*, 2011, etching (hard ground), 6 x 8 cms

**Middle:** *Ice Ship*, 2011, etching (hard ground), 5 x 7 cms

**Bottom:** *Chopper*, 2011, etching (soft ground), 13 x 18 cms

