



THOMPSON'S  
HARPENDEN — EST. 1982

PATSY MCARTHUR:  
INVIGORATE





*Pathfinders*

Charcoal on paper  
25 x 38.5 inches



## PATSY MCARTHUR: INVIGORATE

3 – 20 May 2023

Invitation to meet the artist 6-8pm, Wednesday 3rd May  
RSVP & enquiries to [harpenden@thompsonsgallery.co.uk](mailto:harpenden@thompsonsgallery.co.uk)

More drawings, by Patsy can be viewed on our website, [www.thompsonsgallery.co.uk](http://www.thompsonsgallery.co.uk)

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The phenomenon of wild swimming has exploded in recent years, enjoyed as a way to escape the confines of lockdown, to disconnect and spend time with your thoughts, or to take refuge from a scorching summer's day. Either in groups or alone, we venture into seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds. To be in water is to inhabit an alternative dimension, one in which the forces that govern our relationships to the world — gravity, temperature, speed, and sound — are playfully distorted. Far away from the shore, with the earth no longer under our feet, we are weightless, buoyant, free.

For Patsy McArthur, whose Brighton studio gazes out toward the sea, swimmers are a familiar presence. While the Scottish artist has regularly incorporated swimmers and divers into her drawings, this is the first body of work to present them exclusively. Charcoal, her preferred medium, lends itself with astonishing efficacy to distilling the effects of light and movement on the water's surface. It is, in the artist's words, "great for drawing movement, as you can blur it and move around so easily. I like the tension and challenge that comes from trying to capture something that's wet and fluid in a bone-dry medium."

These figures, and their watery contexts, are drawn from McArthur's experiences, from the sea close to her home in Brighton, to a lap pool in Lisbon and a spa in the Alps. She begins each composition by loosely consulting her own photos and videos for a sense of light and contrast. Her talent for life drawing quickly moves in, and the references fall away to make room for sensations that escape the camera — sensations, such as rhythm and texture, that can only be imparted by the artist's hand. Indeed, the subtle gradients between white surface and black charcoal prove equal to a vast array of vivid colour paints in their expressive potential.

The shape of water, as Patsy McArthur teaches us, is less a fixed, observable phenomenon than a tangible result of imposing light with dark, mass with space, and form with flow. As we grapple with it for ourselves — ducking waves in a choppy sea, swimming lap after lap in a community pool, or plumbing the cool depths of a faraway lake — we undergo, "a sense of renewal, a hopeful sense that after the experience we're going to be somehow slightly changed, slightly different."





*Contemplation (study)* Charcoal on paper 12.5 x 16.5 inches



*Open Water (study)* Charcoal on vanilla paper 12.5 x 16.5 inches



*Night Swim* Ink and charcoal on paper 25 x 22.5 inches





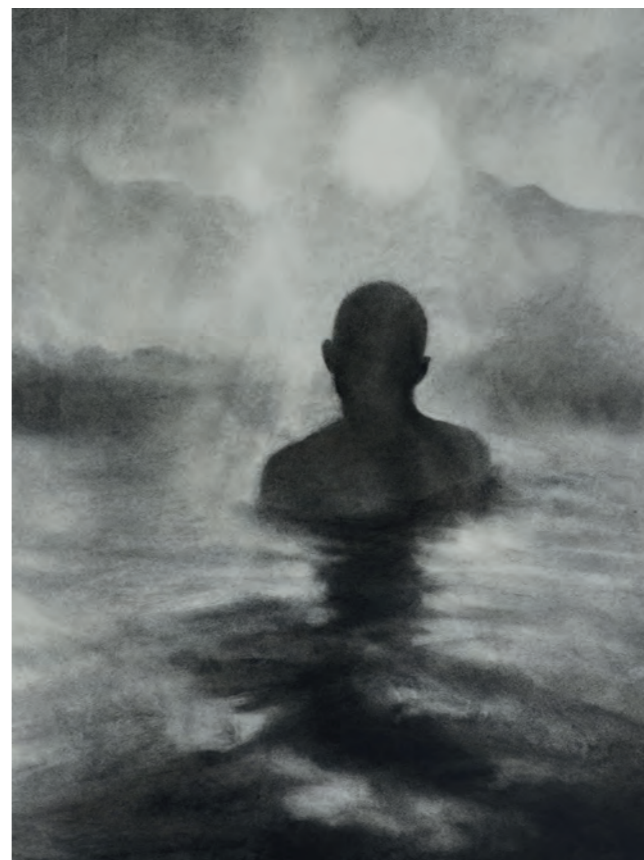
*Echo*  
Charcoal on paper  
41 x 41 inches (left)

*Golden Hour*  
Charcoal on paper  
45 x 56 inches (right)





*Glide* Charcoal on paper 45 x 30 inches



*Sanctum*  
Charcoal on vanilla paper  
31 x 24 inches



*Lookout*

Graphite, charcoal, and gesso on paper  
27.5 x 16 inches

*Toward the Pier*

Charcoal on paper  
28 x 34.5 (Front cover)

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