

Euan Uglow  
1932-2000

Classical focus

# Formative Years 1940s-70s

- b. 1932 - same year as **David Hockney & Howard Hodgkin**
- Encouraged by his mother, he trained first at the Junior Art School of the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, S.London from 1947-50, under **John Minton, Claude Rodgers, William Coldstream** and **Lawrence Gowing** (these last 3 were founding members of The Euston Road School - dedicated to social observation in a 'constructive' style loosely based on **Cézanne**). He quickly gravitated to the **Life Room** where he excelled, and 'life-painting' became one of the dominant features of his art.
- From Coldstream (and Cézanne) he learned that painting was made piece by piece in a slow additive process; that the end image had to be fought for against chaos, and that subjectivity can be controlled and kept in check by constantly measuring, verifying and comparing.
- From **Victor Pasmore** and **Sam Carter** (and ultimately **Piero della Francesca**) he picked up a passion for geometry and mathematics to underlie and structure a canvas.
- From 1950-54: He studied at **The Slade School of Fine Art**, London, the leading figurative art school in the UK. Coldstream and many of his Camberwell tutors also moved to the Slade.
- At that time, the dominant options for artists were to follow **Picasso** into some kind of expressive figuration or follow the **American Abstractionists (Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt etc)** into abstract formalism, or indeed to develop **conceptual tendencies** (following **Duchamp**) although this did not really develop until the 1960s.
- **Figurative empiricism**, following on from Impressionism and Cézanne, as Uglow chose, did not seem to be a mainstream, and is perhaps still not perceived as a mainstream line to follow, but it is a line which has had a particular resonance in the UK, both in London and in Leeds, where **Lawrence Gowing, Claude Rodgers**, and later Uglow's pupil **Paul Gopal-Chowdhury** taught in the 1970s.



# Sir William Coldstream, , “Reclining Nude”, 1974-6,

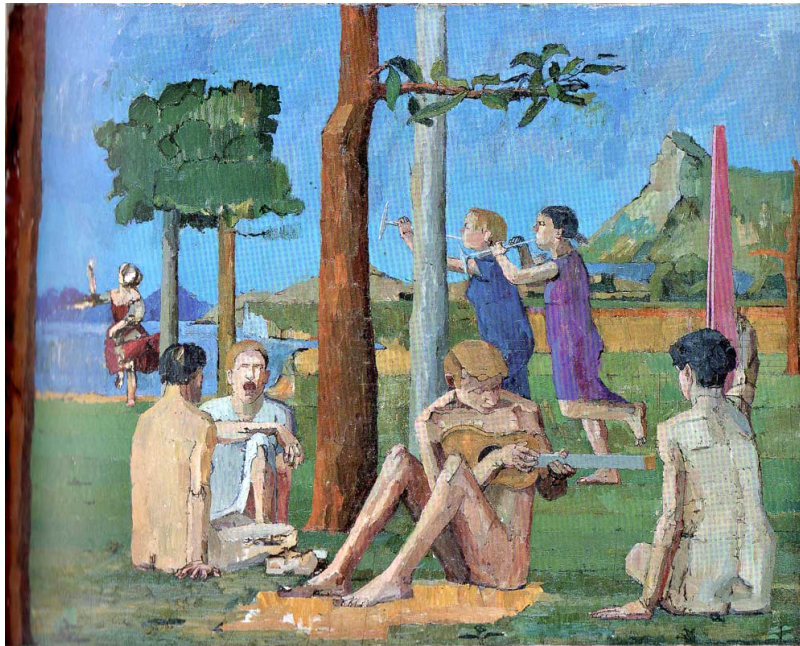


- Oil on Canvas, 101.6 x 127cm
- Tate Gallery London
- Typical of Coldstream’s slow, measured, cumulative style of painting where very relation of tone, colour and spatial position is checked and verified against a relatively empirical system which compensates for errors and weaknesses of judgement made by the eye alone.
- The idea is to make as ‘objective’ a painting as possible, avoiding overt subjective expression in favour of calm and accurate contemplation.

# Formative Years 1940s-70s

- Uglow's contemporaries at the Slade included Michael Andrews, Craigie Aitchison and **Myles Murphy**, Paula Rego, **Patrick George** and Phillip Sutton. Equally important were his encounters with **Francis Bacon**, **Lucien Freud** and **Alberto Giacometti**.
- In 1952 his "Standing Nude" won first prize at the Slade. Influenced by Coldstream who had returned to painting from the model at the time, but also echoes the writings of **Adrian Stokes** about empiricism, and **A.J.Ayer's** work on "Language Truth & Logic" (accepting logic and mathematics as 'certain and necessary, but all other propositions as uncertain hypotheses, waiting to be verified')
- Attended seminars on Realism by **David Sylvester**, and **Rudolf Wittkower**, who introduced him to Piero and other Renaissance artists (Carter & Wittkower wrote a seminal article at this time: The Perspective of Piero Della Francesca's "Flagellation" in the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute). Piero's "Baptism" also gave him an image of serene, static figures in a harmonious relation to their surroundings.

# Musicians, 1953, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff,



- Oil on Canvas, 101.5 x 127 cm
- For “The Musicians” He described his plan: “I was determined to try and paint a picture using all the old methods like perspective’ one ‘where I knew how wide the cone (of vision) was, how far away it was, how wide the trees were, the big mountain in the back, the Matterhorn, was”...
- Two models are posed on the studio floor. Behind them is a painted composition, continuing the perspective into an imaginary distance, measurable by means of the vertical trees and columns placed around the composition. The fictive space is calculated using a grid of finely drawn lines, still visible in the canvas.
- The painting marked the end of his student days and was also his last attempt to paint complex figurative allegories with multiple figures.

# Euan Uglow

- The “Musicians’ was intended as his ‘Prix de Rome’ piece following his undergraduate studies. He failed to win the prize, but instead received a smaller grant to study in Italy for 6 months. The legacy of the painting however remained: the idea that a painting is a carefully conceived intellectual project, with a geometrical/mathematical base, and the idea that colour and form should be observed only from life.
- In 1954, he returned to the Slade as a Postgraduate student; followed by a period in farming and construction as a conscientious objector. He made further trips to Spain and France in 1957, where he met Giacometti, but this period produced few resolved paintings.
- The search for moral perfection in Camus’ “Plague’ and the debates about ‘Realism’ which occupied the tutors in the Slade, had a lasting impression on him.
- In Uglow, each canvas concerns a real visual encounter or series of encounters with a person, a landscape or a group of objects, under a gaze that is both unrelenting, and tender. The crispness of the colours, the clarity of his contours and the intensity of the light reflect an absolutely lucid and conscious art, created slowly, with great subtlety and precision, and an absolute clarity of concept.
- The passage of time (often years) is recorded in the slow accumulation of brushstrokes, measuring marks, and revisions which are logged on the surface of the canvas as part of the image, or rather which float, between the image and the eye of the artist/spectator.
- Behind the apparently simple imagery is a host of reference, allusion to past art, theoretical questions about observation and reality, space and perception. They are empirical paintings but also propositions, questions and experiments.
- He defined his lifetime’s work as, ‘his own personal research’.



# Still Life with a Delft Vase, 1959

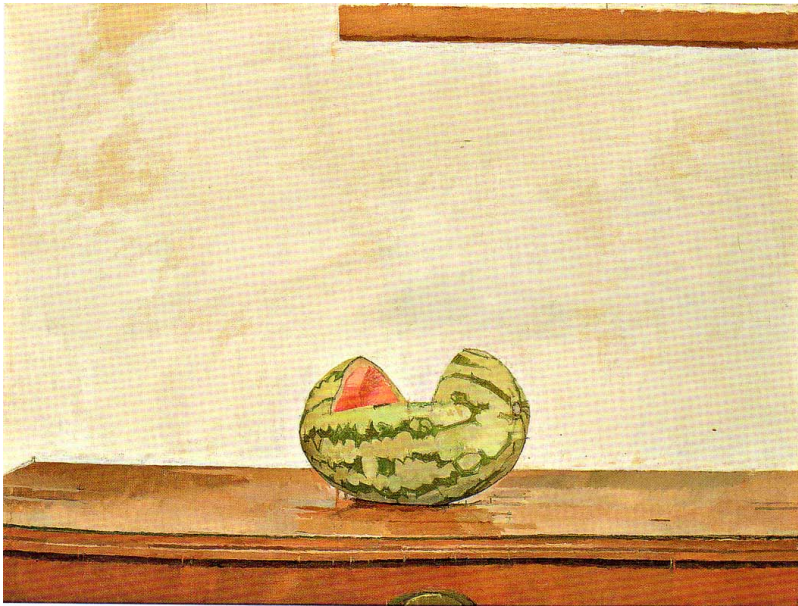
Arts Council, Hayward Gallery, Collection



- Oil on Canvas, 61 x 51 cm
- Like Chardin, from now on, Uglow's work concentrated on observing and recording the precise interaction of various objects and figures in space and light, measuring their physical proportions and the distances between them, and their relative colours and tones in a unified and controlled light.
- They reflect Cézanne in their handling, where each brushstroke is a temporal decision, and also Giacometti, where each mark establishes a relation between one object and another, or one plane and another in space
- Uglow adds details like the coin, to help the viewer understand the 'roundness' of objects where only a side view is visible. Like Piero, the space is measurable.
- Like Caravaggio, every spatial relationship is clear and unambiguous.

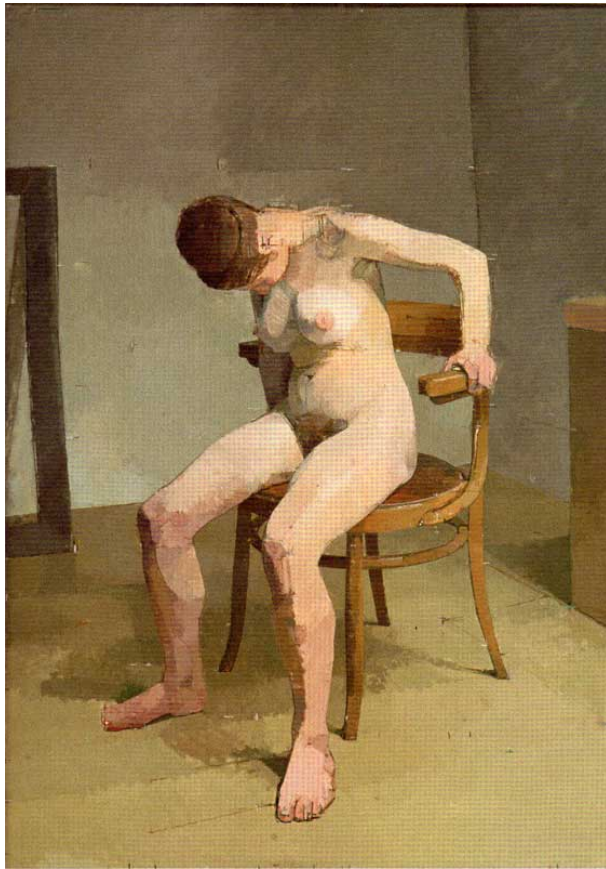
# Watermelon in Morocco, 1963

Ugnow Estate, London.



- Oil on Canvas, 76 x 100.3 cm
- In the Watermelon, like Chardin's "Cut Melon" (1760), the melon is cut in such a way as to reveal its 'hidden' structure, and its far side, not visible only from the side view. Thus the mind can better grasp its essential form. The problem with optical painting is, as Leonardo said, that "Painting relates only to surfaces", whereas the mind can 'see' or understand that which is hidden from it, by deduction.
- Compared to the previous work, Ugnow has lightened his palette and brightened his colours, after his summer travels in Italy, Spain, France, Morocco and Turkey.

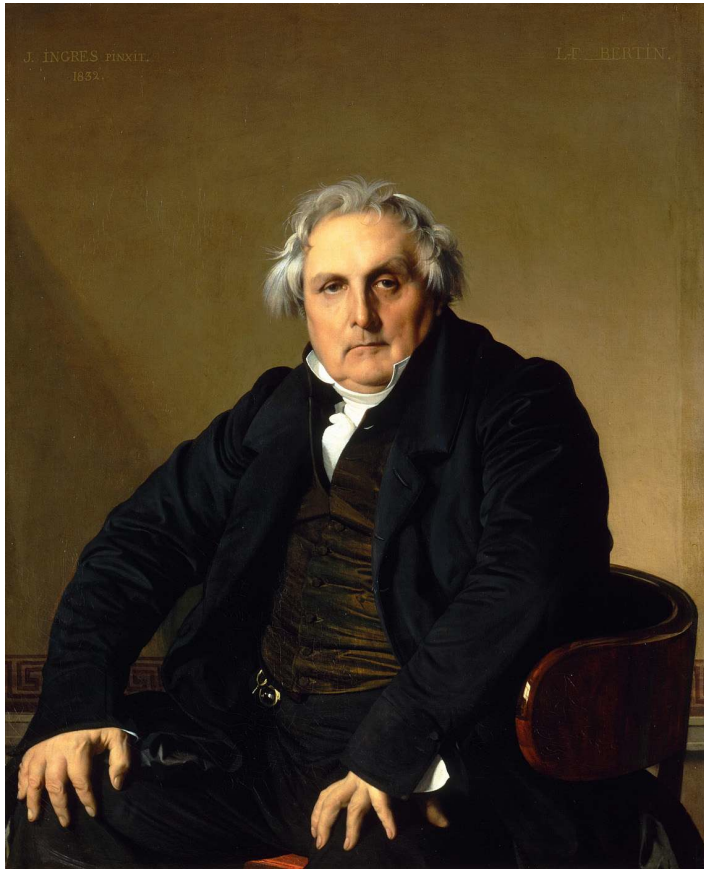
# Nude getting up 1962-3, Tate Gallery, London



- Oil on Canvas 164 x 117 cm
- Based on a famous portrait by Ingres of M. Bertin caught in the moment of getting up from his chair, Uglow here tackles the problem of how to paint implied motion.
- The obvious strain in the model's upper arms suggests that she is transferring body weight to her arms pushing down on the chair arms, so as to raise herself to a vertical. The painting captures this moment of suspended motion.



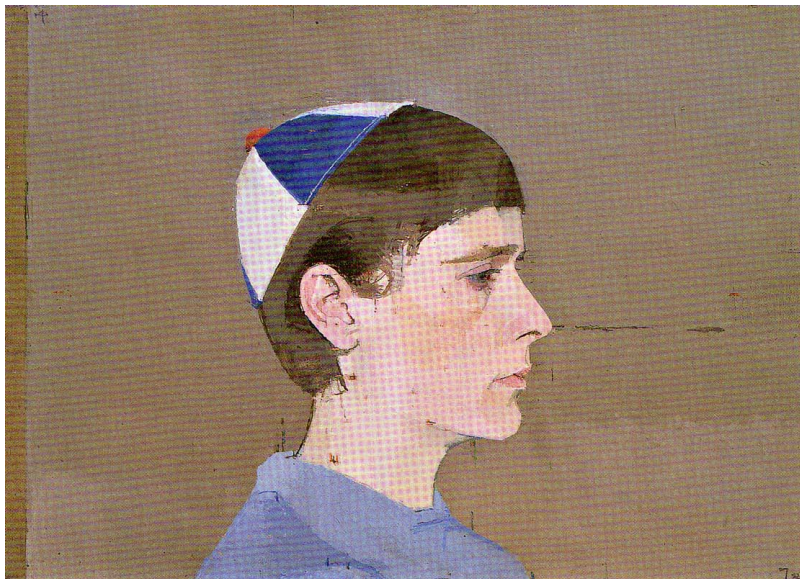
# J.A.D Ingres, Portrait of M. Bertin, 1832, Louvre, Paris,



- Oil on Canvas 116.2 x 94.9 cm
- The sitter was famously impatient with Ingres' slow progress in finding a suitable pose for him, and, frustrated, got up to leave.
- Ingres found his pose and captured the moment when M.Bertin is stretching himself, about to get up from his chair.

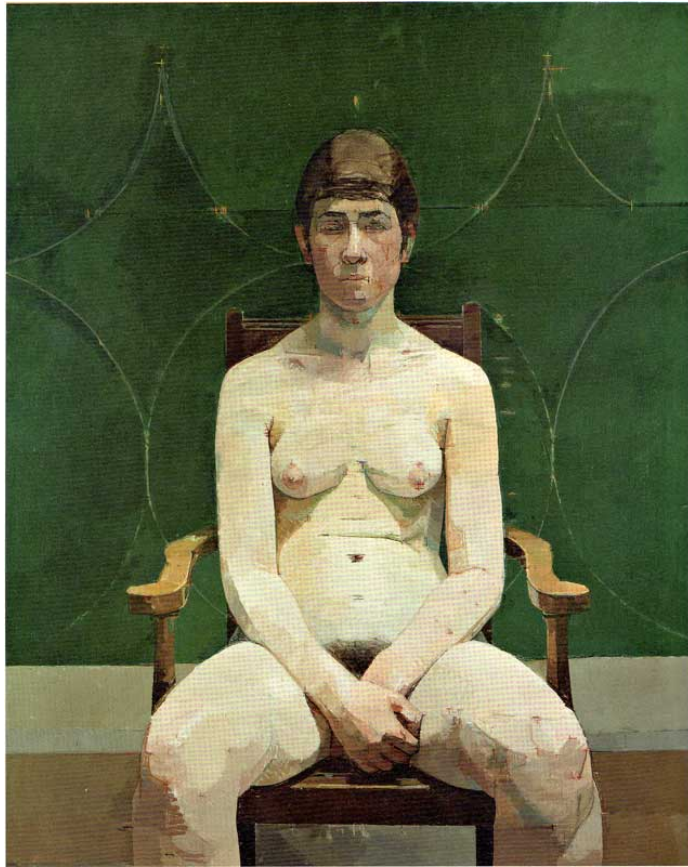


# Girl in Profile with Cap on, 1963-4, Arts Council Collection, Hayward Gallery, London



- Oil on Board, 40 x 55.9 cm
- Uglow frequently tried to find purely visual 'solutions' to formal problems. Here the blue and white headgear was carefully constructed out of paper, painted in such a way as to suggest the oval shape of the model's head.
- She is posed in precise profile, with the point nearest the painter's eye where the diagonals of the canvas cross.
- A horizon-line, representing the artist's level of vision, meets the tip of her nose and passes through the centre of her ear.
- The whole has the simplicity and formal purity of a Piero head.

# Nude with a Green Background, 1964-5, Private Collection



- Oil on Canvas, 112.5 x 89.5 cm
- Here, the circular shapes in white were drawn by Uglow on the wall behind the model to continue with the inner three-dimensional structure of both chair and figure. As with Chardin and Caravaggio, the front of the picture plane represents the nearest part of the figure to the eye, and the top represents the furthest point. In between the depth of form is articulated by a precise ‘mapping’ of the surfaces of leg, body and chair, ‘back’ to the Green wall.
- There are no spatial ambiguities.

# The Mosque at Çiftlik Koyou,

1966, Rudd Collection, UK



- Oil on Canvas, 105 x 121 cm
- Dedicated to painting every day, Uglow only traveled if he won a travel grant or to see particular paintings in overseas museums. He received a number of bursaries from the Slade and other sources which enabled him to travel to Turkey, Italy, Switzerland and Cyprus. When he traveled, he would make one or two specific paintings about the location, seeking for an image which would capture the essential quality of a place - the architecture, landscape or light,
- Here he captures the stark geometry of the minaret, slightly off centre against the pure blue sky. The forms in the landscape are rendered only as definite shapes of clear colour.



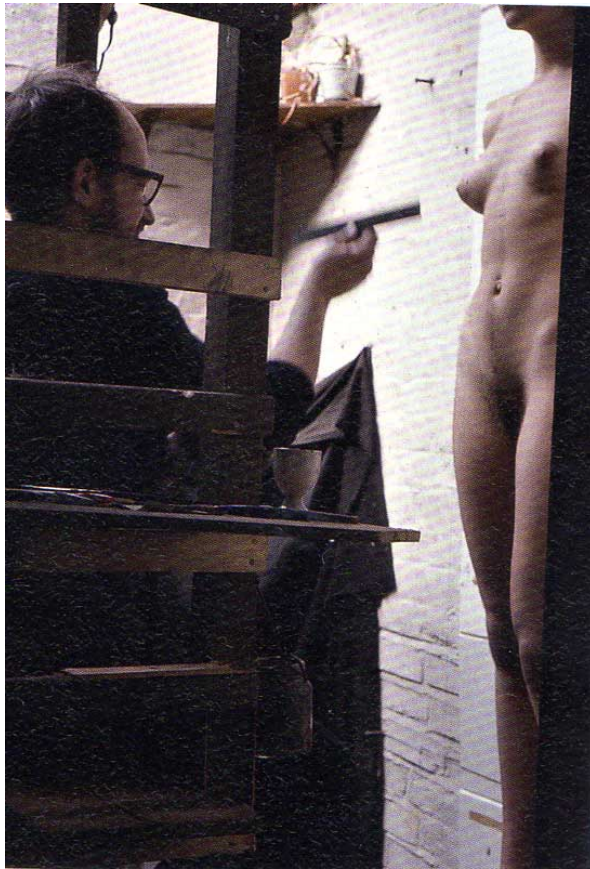
# Nude from 12 Regular Vertical

Positions from the Eye, 1967, University of Liverpool



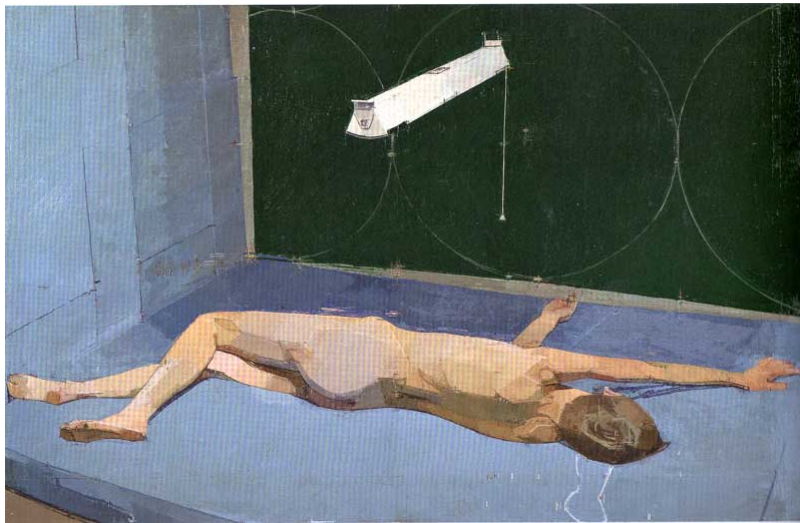
- Oil on Board, 244 x 91.5 cm
- In this painting, which won the prestigious John Moore's Painting Competition in Liverpool, and whose making was featured in a BBC documentary, Uglow tries to sum up his personal aesthetic. The model is posed in a classical 'Contraposto' pose, with the weight on one leg. The coloured bands represent the nearness or distance of the body part to the eye of the artist
- The thicker the band of ochre, the closer it is to the eye. Because of the distorting effect of looking at a vertical form from a single horizon line/viewpoint, Uglow constructed a system whereby he could move his head down through 12 different regular positions. Each position would entail its own slight distortion, but overall, the result would be 'more true' than painting from just one. The resultant figure appears much taller than we are used to seeing, because we only see the world from one vertical position - our eyeline.
- By this time, Uglow had settled into his studio in Turnchapel Mews, Battersea, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. It permitted continuity and long-term focus for his work.

# Studio set-up for ‘Nude from 12 Regular Vertical Positions from the Eye’, 1967



- A scene from the BBC Documentary on Uglow at work on the painting, with the twelve eye positions marked out by wooden slats on a structure he prepared in the studio
- The yellow bands are notably absent: they are conceptual rather than optical and serve only to help ‘explain’ an optical fact.

# Three in One, 1967-8, Estate of John Paul Getty Jr



- Oil on Canvas, 91.5 x 141.2 cm
- In this painting, the diagonal space is 'measured' by the overhead electric heater, hovering in space above the model.
- The white circles, traced on the green again help to articulate the distance, and also allude to the three models who posed for the making of this picture. The first model died in a car crash, and Uglow had to decide to abandon the picture or continue with a new model, posed in the same position. The second model left after some time, and a third model was employed to complete the picture.
- The concept of the painting was independent of the individual subject.<sup>15</sup>

# Georgia, 1968-73

## The British Council, London.



- Oil on Canvas, 83.8 x 111.8 cm
- Georgia Georgallas, a favourite model posed for this painting. Again, Uglow painted the flower form on the sofa to help articulate the space, and asked her to cut her hair in a particular shape to match the geometry of the painting. Unsure at first, she was eventually persuaded to do so by a Slade tutor who advised her that to refuse would be to 'hinder the future of art'.
- The left leg is carefully positioned in the bottom left of the picture plane to form a sweeping curve echoed in the painted flowers



# Summer Picture, 1971-2

Private Collection

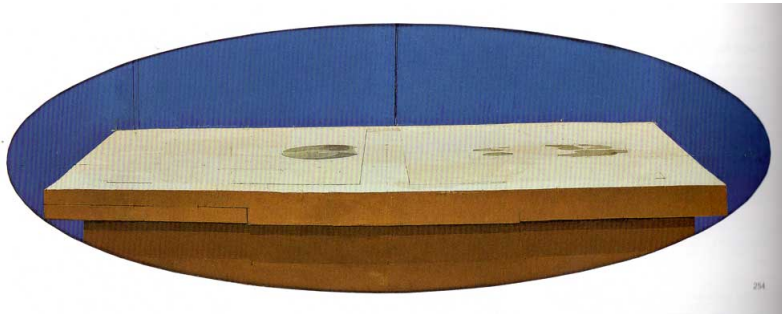


- Oil on Canvas, 109.2 x 110 .5 cm
- Uglow painted the back wall of his studio in 'Reckett's Blue' a chemical blue which used to be added to washing powder to make clothes 'whiter'. It is a very intense blue, which Uglow used repeatedly to suggest outdoors, summer, the skies of Aix-en-Provence or Piero's Italy.
- He poses the model to correspond to a precise geometrical shape against this abstracted 'sky'
- The table top has been re-modelled to counteract the optical 'bending' which occurs when looking at a flat plane from a single viewpoint What appears to be a flat line is in fact a counter-<sub>17</sub> curve,



# Still Life with Model Marks,

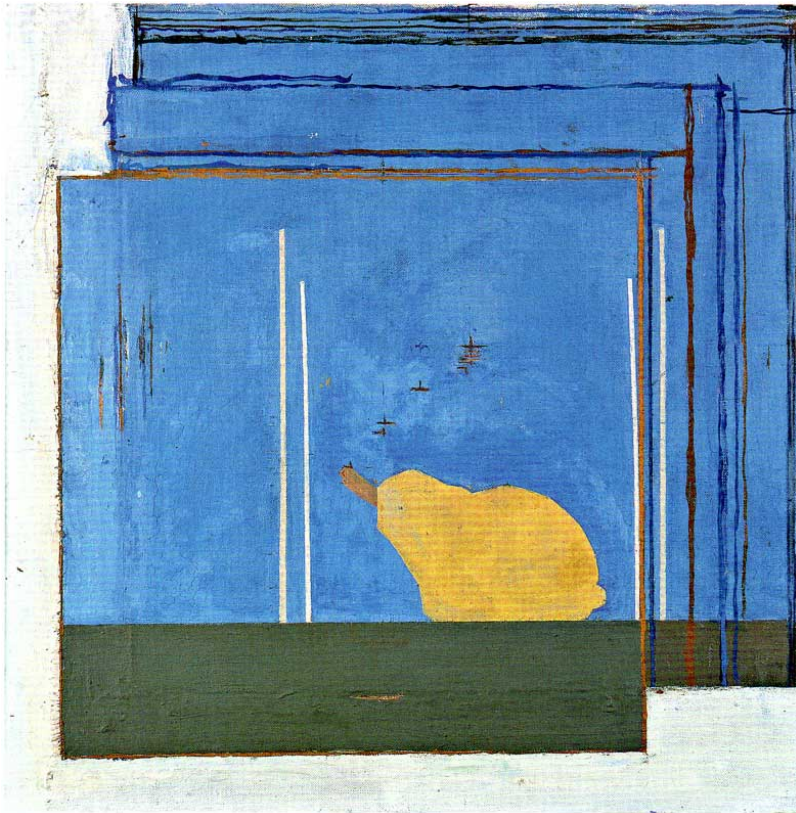
1971-2, Uglow Estate



- Oil on Canvas on Board, 40.6 x 114.9 cm
- When the model was away, Uglow continued to paint the scene without her, so as not to lose time waiting. But his aesthetic meant that he could not continue with the same painting in the absence of the model. All had to be directly observed.
- The marks left by such a prolonged pose, became a subject in their own right, and the oval shaped marks give rise to the overall oval shapes of the canvas

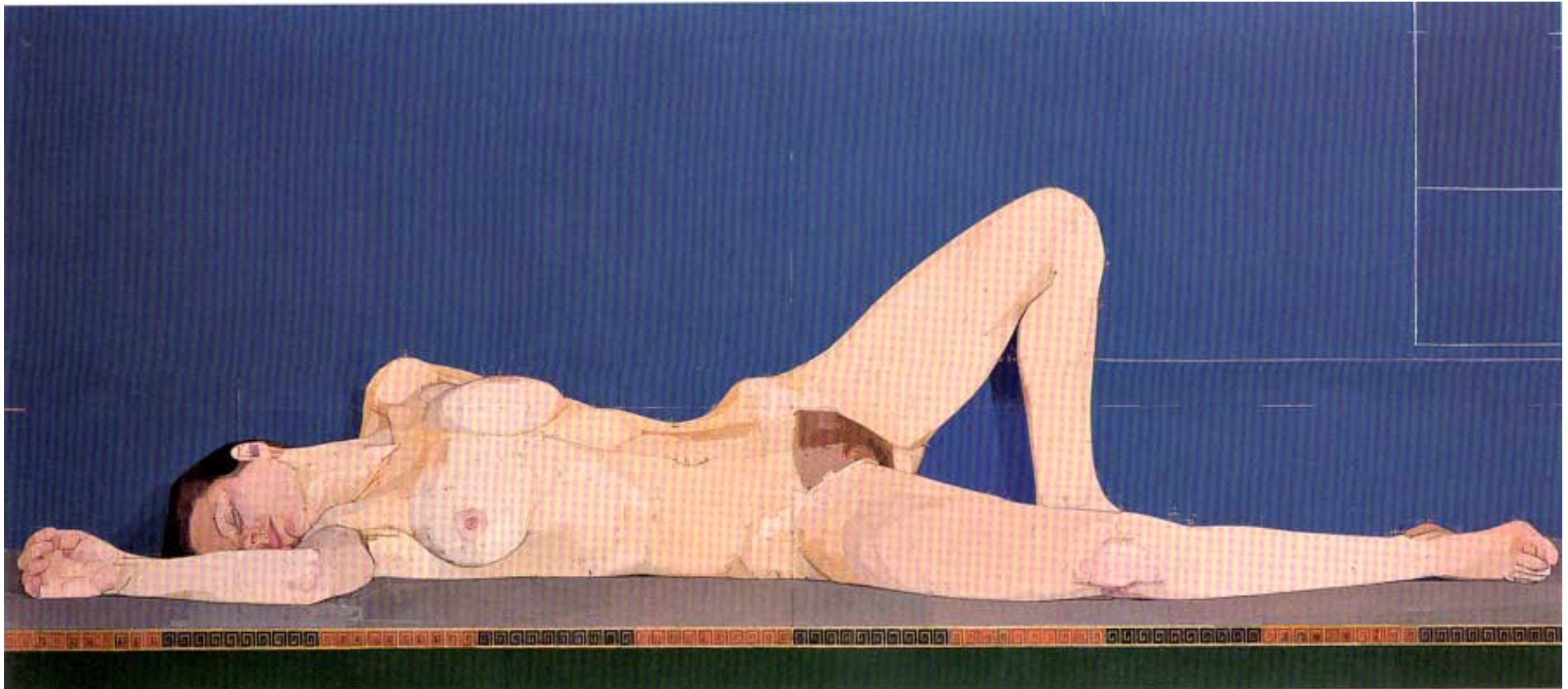
# Diary of a Pear, 1972

Private Collection.

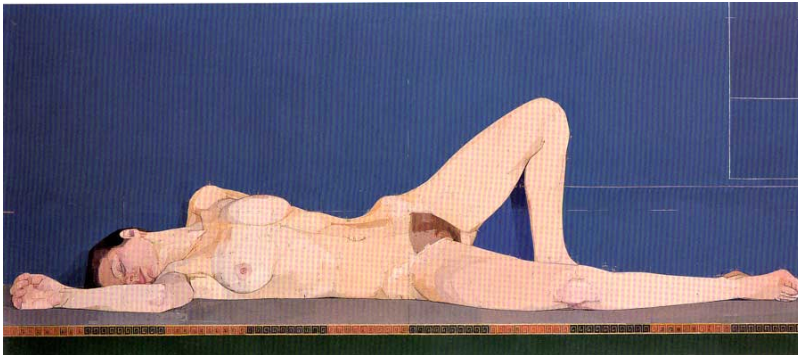


- Oil on Canvas on Board, 41.2 x 41.2 cm
- Here Uglow set himself some simple rules: The tip of the stalk would always have to be in the geometric centre of the square canvas.
- As the painting took some time, the pear started gradually to decompose, and the centre of gravity shifted. So, a new square was mapped out with the new position of the pear and stalk always preserved in the centre.
- Thus the painting became a temporal record of the pear's existence.

# Root 5 Nude, 1974-5, Estate of John Paul Getty Jr.



# Root 5 Nude, 1974-5, Estate of John Paul Getty Jr.



- Oil on Canvas, 76.9 x 172.2 cm
- Here the model is again posed in a precise geometrical arrangement, the shape of the canvas, and the triangle created by her raised leg precisely the classical ‘golden section’ proportion, alluded to in the square and rectangle in white on the top right, and in the classical ‘stepped fret’ design along the plinth on which she poses.
- In fact the picture involved two models, the second and final one, Sietske Smid, remained loyal to the protracted process required to finish the picture.
- This is an attempt to make a ‘classical’ nude, as in the Renaissance, as in Praxiteles, finding an ideal proportion within the body of the model, and rendering this explicit using mathematics as a base.



# Nude with Lake Lugano, 1976

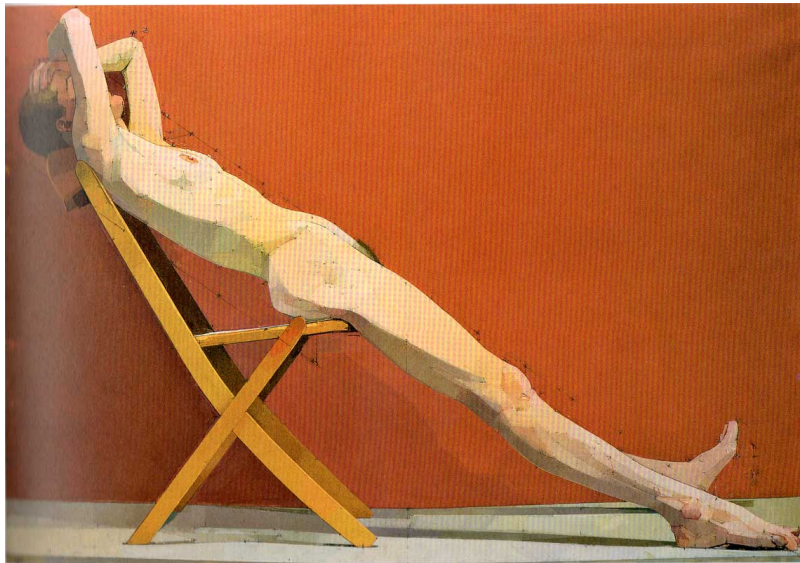
Private Collection, New York.



- Oil on Canvas, 87.6 x 138.4 cm
- Uglow traveled to Switzerland specifically to see some paintings in the Thyssen collection, and whilst there painted two pictures of a model, posed in the hotel against a painted green background, 'representing' Lake Lugano. The back of the model 'stands in' for the near shore, while the small shapes painted at the top, represent the various buildings and trees of the 'far' shore of the lake. The theme of the integration of nude figures and landscape setting is precisely that of Cézanne's late "Bathers".

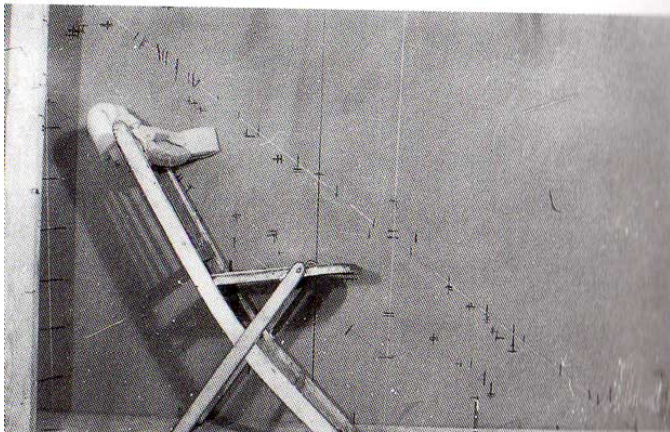
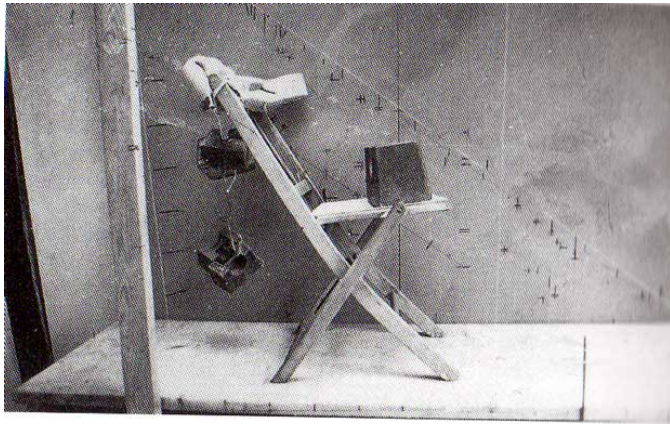
# The Diagonal, 1971-7

Estate of John Paul Getty Jr.



- Oil on Canvas, 118 x 167 cm
- The severe geometry of the pose is clear. In order to maintain the precise positioning of chair and background every day, Uglow constructed an elaborate stage, with key positions marked out in pen or pencil on the background. A heavy weight was used to keep the chair in place when the model was absent. Eventually, Uglow painted small marks on the model too, and asked her not to wash them off between sittings.
- The difficulty in keeping the pose for more than a few minutes meant that the painting took an extraordinarily long time, and is a testament to the perseverance of the model as much as it is to Uglow, as he himself acknowledged.

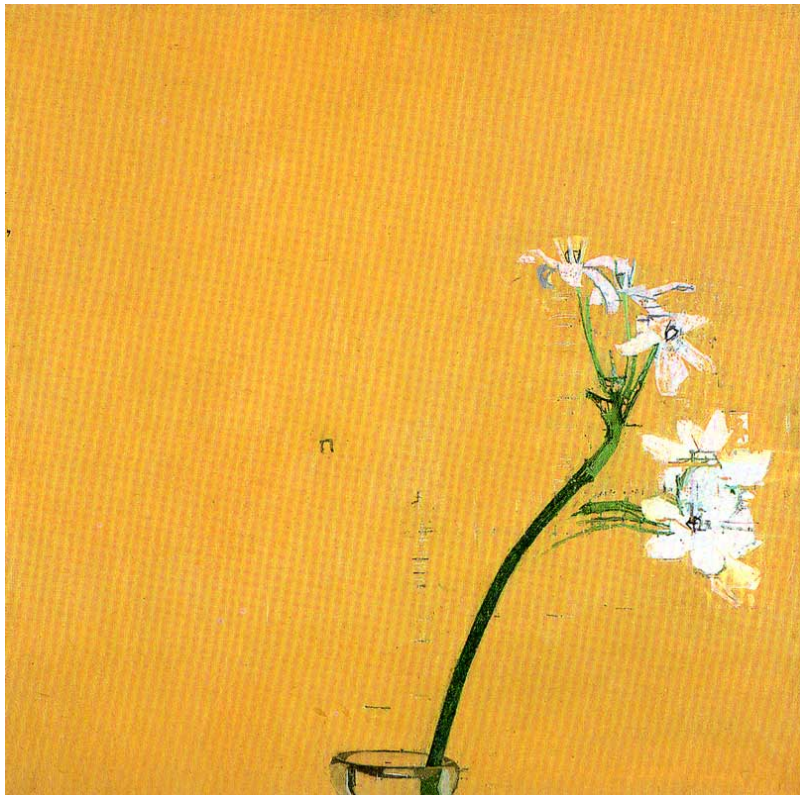
# Studio set-up for “The Diagonal”, 1971-77



- Showing the measuring marks, the weight to keep the chair in place when the model was absent, and the constructed stage with Uglow’s viewpoint fixed - the vertical stick represents the left edge of the canvas.



# Narcissus on a Yellow Background, 1978, Diamond Trading Company Collection.



- Oil on Canvas, laid on panel, 38.6 x 38.6 cm.
- In between the larger, slower, and more complex figure paintings, Uglow always had a few smaller paintings of objects to maximise his time spent painting. These often reflect the concepts at play in the larger works, and always there is the same concern for geometry, careful placing of objects in space against a coloured background - usually painted by himself to fit with the painting.
- Often in his smaller paintings, he allows himself a gentler, lighter, or more humorous aspect.



# The Quarry Pignano, 1979-80

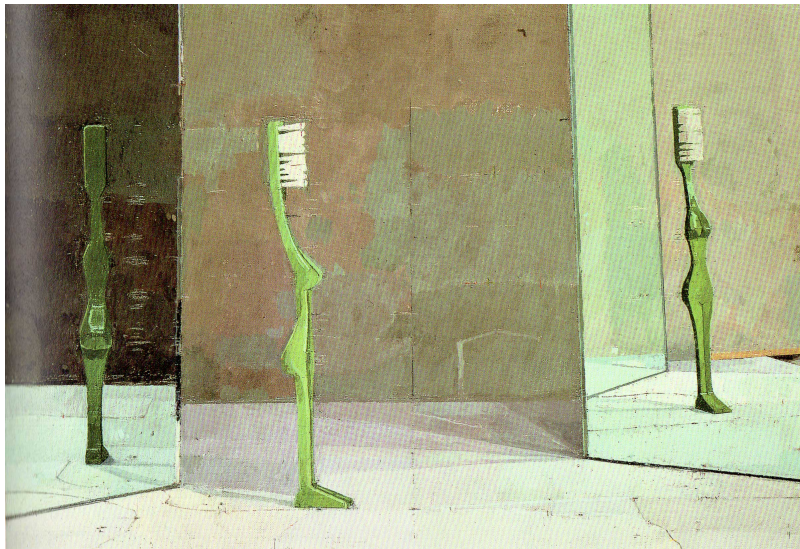
Hayward Gallery, Arts Council Collection, London



- Oil on Canvas, 80 x 113.5 cm
- On a trip to Italy to see the Piero della Francesca frescoes, Uglow stayed with friends in a villa near the Umbrian town of Pignano. Nearby there was a quarry, carved out of the side of a mountain, forming a 'v'-shaped indentation in the triangular shaped mountain.
- Imitating this natural formation, Uglow posed the model in the same shape, with the blue 'key' top left, guiding the viewer to a conceptual understanding of the quarry shape seen from above. The yellow soil and brown clay of Umbria (burnt Umber is an artists' colour) are reflected in the brown and yellow of the painting.

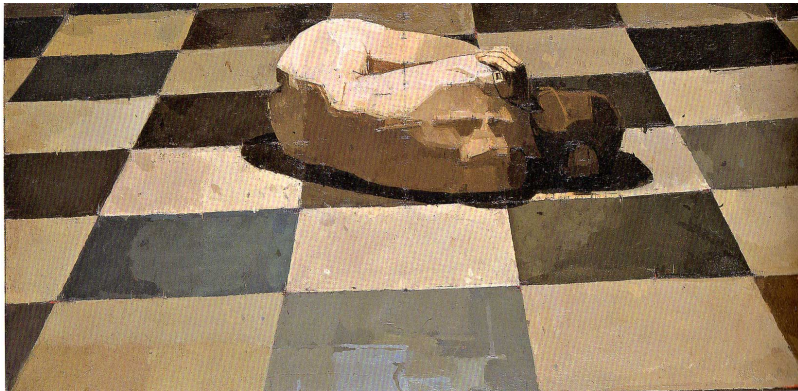
# The Three Graces, 1979-81

## Private Collection



- Oil on Canvas, 32 x 46 cm
- Amused by the kitsch form of this plastic toothbrush, designed by Italian designer Alessi, Uglow 'posed' it against two mirrors, so that it creates 'three' models, seen from back, side and front at the same time, echoing the classical 'Judgement of Apelles'. The painting reflects the wry humour often at work in Uglow's paintings, even when the activity of painting is for him absolutely serious, slow and painstaking.

# Double square, double square, 1980-82, Private Collection.

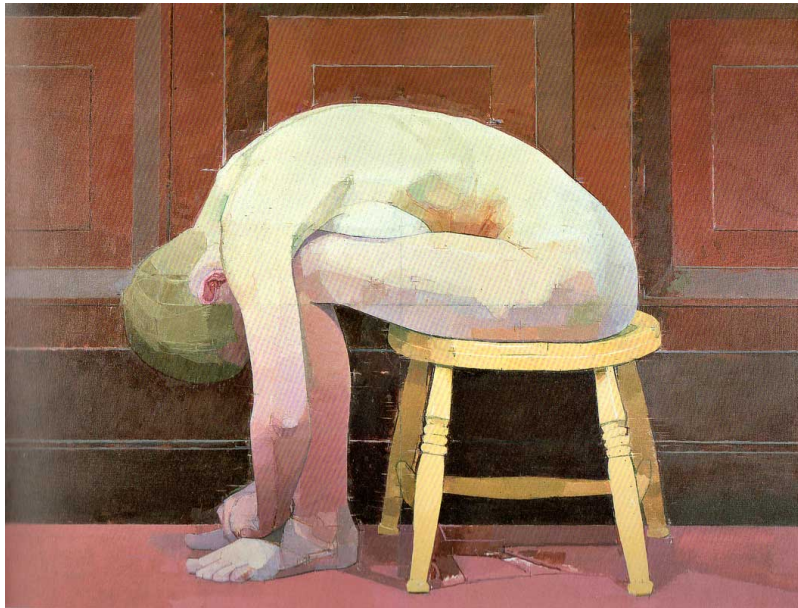


- Oil on Canvas, 22.7 x 45.4 cm
- Painted at night, under artificial lighting, colour differentiations are difficult to perceive and judge. Uglow thus avoided colour, painting only in ochre and black. The square 'tiles' were painted too, to help articulate the distorting effects of vision, even of something as regular as a set of squares receding in space. The model occupies a space composed of 3 x 3 squares, in a visible space of 6 x 6 squares. The canvas is also a double square, but none of the squares seem to 'match up'.



# Curled Nude on a Stool, 1982-3

Ferens Art Gallery, Hull.



- Oil on Canvas, 78 x 100 cm
- The model, who was particularly flexible, was able to pose in the desired shape for Uglow, but only for a limited time, as the pressure on her back was quite strong. The chair had to be adapted to make it seem more regular than it actually was. The eye sees order, where in fact it has to be constructed quite carefully beforehand.

# The Blue Towel, 1982-3, Jerwood Foundation Art Collection



- Oil on Canvas, 24 x 25 cms
- Uglow's interest in early Quattrocento art meant that he was aware of the element of 'narrative' in some Italian fresco cycles (Giotto, Piero, Ambrogio Lorenzetti). He had mostly avoided narrative since the early "Musicians", but here it reappears in the morning ritual of his model, getting up, picking up a towel, and going to have a shower. The three stages of motion are represented by the same model in three different spatial positions. The temporal narrative is explained by the gradual diminution of the figure into the pictorial space. At each stage, the definition of her form becomes less three dimensional.

# Yesilirmak, North Cyprus, 1985

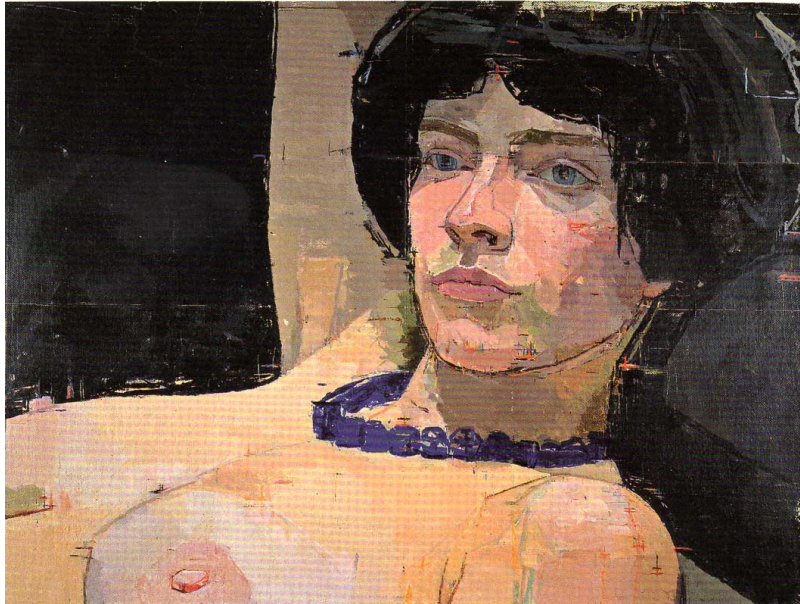
Coll. Paul & Pauline Smith, London.



- Oil on Canvas, 88.3 x 125.4 cm
- On a travel grant to Turkish-occupied North Cyprus, Uglow found himself in trouble with the Turkish military. Out painting in the landscape, he found that a rock in the distance was in an annoying position for the harmony of his painting. So he went over and tried to move it out of the way. The Turkish army arrested him, anxious that he might be a Greek Cypriot spy or up to no good, and nearly confiscated the painting. The story is typical of his absolute commitment to paint only what he can see, and not to 'imagine' anything which was not there.

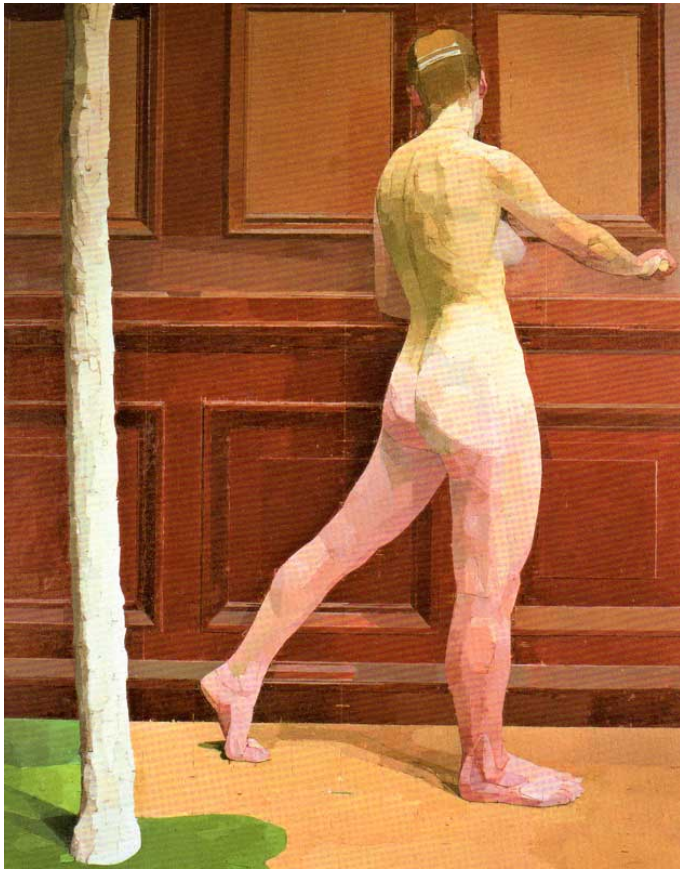


# Zoë, 1987-93, Private Collection



- Oil on Canvas, laid on Panel, 30.5 x 40.6 cm
- A relatively small picture, painted over a very long time, it nevertheless represents one of Uglow's most resolved paintings. Uglow had the blue necklace specially made for the model to echo the shape of her hair (in fact a wig) and articulate her face and shoulders. The black background is also chosen to set off her hair colour. The horizon line passes through the corner of her mouth. The painting includes some of the most complex tonal passages of all Uglow's work.

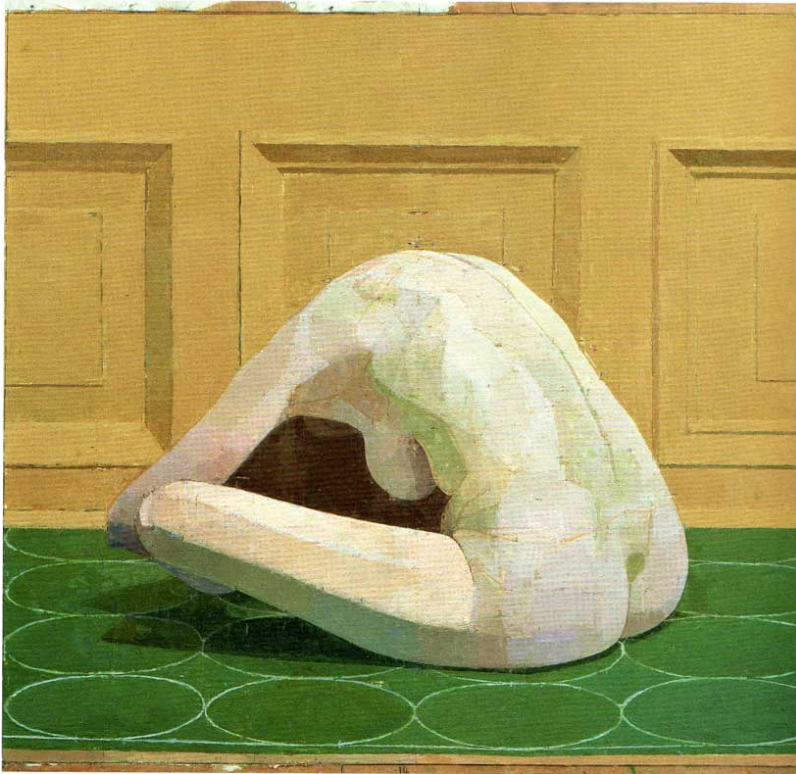
# Girl Tree, 1989-93, Paul Carbone Coll., Chicago



- Oil on Canvas, 120.6 x 151.7 cm
- This painting picks up the theme of implied or frozen movement. The pose is constructed to suggest a moment of transition, moving right to left, and simultaneously turning to the left. The artificial ‘tree’ is there as a counterbalance to this swinging movement and to allude to the classical idylls of Cézanne and Poussin, another of Uglow’s key inspirations.
- The wooden panelling was taken from a demolished pub.
- Cézanne had said that he wanted to paint “Poussin over again from nature”
- Uglow’s ambition is often very much the same.



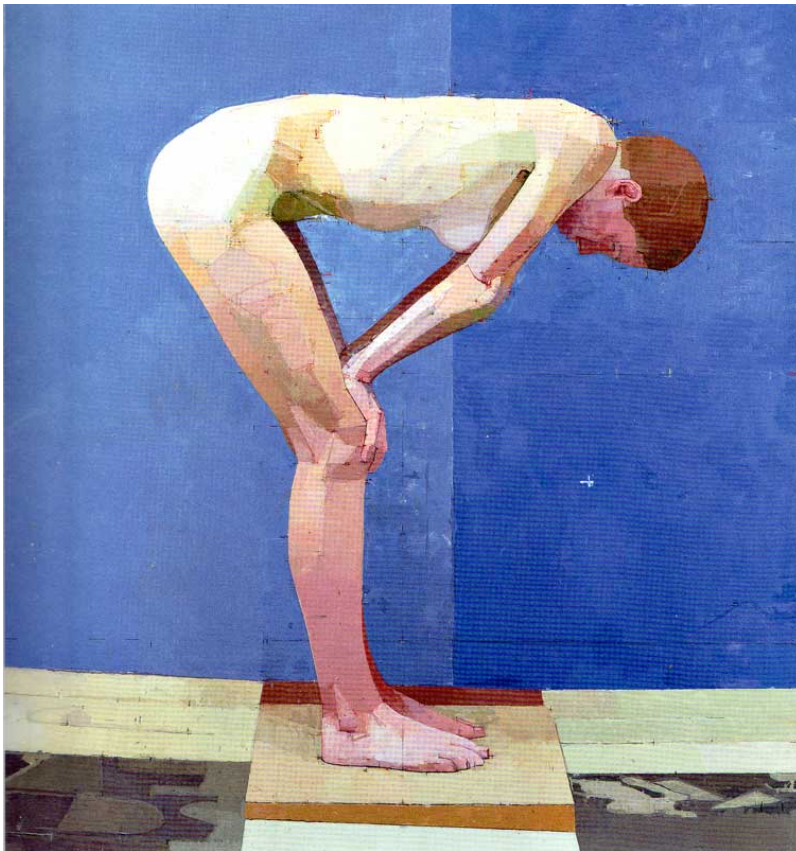
# Pyramid, 1993-6, Louver Collection, Venice California USA



- Oil on Canvas, 50.8 x 55.8 cms
- Fascinated by the form of the Egyptian Pyramids, Uglow set this composition up to pay homage to them. The pose was extremely difficult for the model, as Uglow acknowledged. The paintings are only possible because of the interaction of painter and model, and Uglow depends on the full and active participation of the model in the process.
- The white circles on green, seen in several of his previous paintings, are here again employed to help articulate the relative space occupied by the figure.
- The yellow wall (which appears in the previous picture painted brown) with its square indentations reference the sand of the desert and the base plans of the three famous pyramids at Giza.

# Ali, 1995-7

## Private Collection



- Oil on Canvas, 83.5 x 78 cm
- Set against the blue studio wall, Ali stands in an architectural pose, the plinth sloping up slightly to the right to counterbalance the weight transferred to her knees from her arms, acting like buttresses.
- The back is aligned as far as possible with the straightness of the top edge of the canvas.
- The implied vertical, suggested by the division between the two blues, passes through the meeting point of hands and knees, and coincides with the actual mid-point of the canvas
- Uglow has managed to make us see the invisible force of gravity which enables the model to stand.

# Uglow in his studio, 1900s



- Uglow spent over 50 years painting, most days, all day. His work is a very private, and passionate research into the beauty and paradoxes of the visible world. He chose the model as the most complex, subtle and challenging aspect of the world to paint. Like Cézanne and Chardin, his life's work is a determined, patient love affair with the beauties of light, colour and form, held together with a rigorous structure, proportion and method. His work looks back to past art and yet engages with life in the present.
- In a rare interview he paraphrased Degas: “Art is artifice. It's nothing to do with being true to life. You're trying to construct a new world so that it can stand: nothing to do with illusionsm. I can't bear that idea. I'm painting an idea not an ideal.”
- As he said to one sitter; “Nobody has looked at you as hard as I have”.
- He died after a short illness in 2000, aged 68.