

Emily Sparkes is a painter and visual artist with work in both private and public collection.

Born in Worcester in 1992, Sparkes studied Fine Art at Birmingham City University before completing an MA in Queer Studies in Arts & Culture, and undertaking PhD study.

Sparkes explores the tableau vivant, or living picture, an artsy charade of sorts that entangles performance and painting. Looking to tableaux vivants takes as a given a certain kinship, perversity and humour through performing the image. A comparison must then be drawn between the formation of this titillating pastime within the 18th century Salon, and the contemporary phenomena of appropriating and sharing images in online / virtual spaces in the form of memes, gifs and emoji. This online network of images at once seems commonplace and puerile. However, far from banal, this culture is creating a new power of the image, with emphasis on absurd humour, hyperbole, and hysteria. Furthermore, our contemporary dependence on the screen can perhaps provide a rationale for a re-examination of the canvas and of painting.

Sparkes's current paintings pluck influence from Big Bang Theory anti-fandom memes, bizarre YouTube videos, the online ASMR community, and an ever-growing register of selfies from friends. In an atmosphere of information overload, her canvases so cherish their imagery and reference that they betray their superficial quality almost immediately. A glance at one painting can reveal quotations as far reaching as Neo Rauch, Peter Saul, and Joseph-Marie Vien, to mathematicians and costume designers such as Roger Penrose and Christian Joy. Made to act in new roles, Sparkes's characters are deployed by the artist as totems of sentiment, flamboyancy, uncertainty, social anxiety, and "personal tweakiness".

Emily Sparkes lives and works in Birmingham, England. Her work has been exhibited widely over the past three years including exhibitions the mac, Birmingham; Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery; Wolverhampton Art Gallery; The Herbert Museum & Art Gallery, Coventry; and two shows at Flowers Gallery (Mayfair), London. Her first solo show was held at Havill & Travis, West Midlands, curated by Dave Travis. This was followed up by a second solo exhibition at Artefact, Birmingham in May 2017, which was accompanied by a series of prints. Her painting 'Tinorest' (2016) has recently been selected for the Ruth Borchard Self Portrait Prize 2017 and Sparkes is now continuing her PhD study at the Royal College of Art, London.