

ALICE AMATI

RAFAL TOPOLEWSKI

DUSK

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY 4 JUNE 2025, 6-8PM

5 JUNE - 11 JULY 2026

27 WARREN STREET

W1T 5NB LONDON

Alice Amati is pleased to present *Dusk* - the second solo exhibition with the gallery by Rafal Topolewski (b.1983, Grudziądz, Poland). The exhibition is accompanied by a newly commissioned essay by writer and curator Saša Bogojev.

It's a daunting task having to write about the works of Rafal Topolewski (b.1983, Grudziądz, Poland). His practice revolves around conveying a liminal mental state, known as hypnagogia. Occurring during the transition from wakefulness to sleep, this semi-hallucinogenic space is inherently inconceivable, and one can only hope to merely invite recognition. Therefore, any effort to articulate its contents inevitably turns the consciousness into an "unreliable narrator."

Similarly, it must be a daunting task having to depict the slippery position between reality and dream, awareness and unawareness, recognition and confusion. It must be frustrating to try to hold onto the ideas and visions that keep evaporating into the void of our understanding. Regardless of whether pulled from memory, intentionally projected, or appearing involuntarily, the fugitivity of their presence refuses to take form or carry apparent meaning. Yet the direct emotional and sensory resonance of painting offers genuine advantages in its exploration. While any attempt to put it into words or to replace emotion with information feels too didactic and pseudo-exact, the visuals and how they're created hit a different spot. The hum of color, the energy of mark-making, and the compositional tension strike directly at a pre-cognitive level, where such phenomena occur. And the Polish, Lisbon-based artist is assiduously building up a body of work that proves this, growing stronger and more relevant with each new painting or drawing.

Over time, Topolewski developed a peculiar process that places same importance on what he paints and how he paints it. In other words, the content or the subject matter is as important as the technical approach, the use of materiality, and the way paint is handled. So rather than focusing on the visuals that carry ideas, he is equally interested in how the image, its atmosphere, and the surrounding emotions relate to the way it's painted. "Painting is a physical object, and there is so much discussion beyond the context or the concept of it," he mentions, referring to the surfaces, the palette, and the application. Starting with initial marks in vibrant red or green pencil on gessoed and "dirty" yellow-primed linen, Topolewski resolutely favors the raw vitality of the process over a polished final resolution. Inspired by the duality of awareness giving way to a dreamlike state while (not) falling asleep, the entire process feeds on tension and holds onto uncertainty. Marks and gestures of thin, dry oils are diligently added and removed in an almost craft-like manner while working mostly with an intimate scale. Such an application results in fickle, crumbling surfaces that, soaked in rusty, sepia tones,

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emphasize the borderline-uncanny ambiance of these often arcane visuals. Bathed in a dimly lit, dusky setting, the imagery appears drowsy, softened, and diffused, as if barely caught while lingering in that in-between condition. Mimicking the effects of involuntary sensory hallucinations during the pre-sleep thinning of consciousness, the loss of linear logic becomes the main character—the meeting ground between the artist and the viewer.

At their core, these mental spaces are shaped by anxiety, which turns the transition toward dormancy into a stressful threshold. Representing the loss of control, the otherwise smooth drift into dreamlands can be interrupted by "brain zaps," often flashing from a wholly different storyline. Between those, our brain instinctively tries to fight back by thinking about, building up, or imagining a more relaxing scene where it can let go of control. This is where the seaside scenery comes into play, as an idealized space of refuge. But, given the unpredictability of the mind, such spaces are often obstructed by an unavoidable obstacle, short-circuited by overlapping imagery, or crumbling into seemingly "unfinished" sections. All of these concepts reflect a neither-here-nor-there mental state, the uncertainty or an inability to control the thought process, and a complete loss of conscious awareness. Hence, the *non finito* sections are known to represent a state-of-becoming moment that extends beyond the painting itself, speaking of the human soul or the universe at large. In Topolewski's case, these vacant, underpainted areas often draw attention to the beauty of initial pencil marks and the diversity of painterly surface across different stages of the process. They also serve as an effective metaphor for a failing consciousness while stimulating the observer's cognition by leaving open ends.

In an effort to thoroughly explore this intriguing yet elusive space, the ideas and visuals are frequently revisited. Such an approach offers new potential readings through experimentation with the elements and technical approaches, and connects separate presentations into a large whole. In particular, this exhibition spawned from a new take on a small-scale landscape, *Peacock, 2025*, which was included in Topolewski's solo show at GRIMM in New York last year. The serene pastoral scene of the seaside horizon at dusk presented itself as a perfect motif for exploring a suspended-in-between state. And glimpsed through the scrubland, the vague presence of a peacock, a universal symbol of renewal and immortality, adds depth and poetic undertone to a partially discernible environment. At the same time, the reappearance of the visions underscores the persistence and intensity of this phenomenon. This idea of repetition and self-quoting permeates Topolewski's practice at large, with imagery such as clocks and dials, thistles, seaside landscapes, or portraits regularly reappearing in slightly shifted contexts. Chosen for the way they connect the individual and the universal, they maintain a subjective, intimate approach while opening the conversation to a wider audience. So, whether introspecting through portraits and self-portraits, probing the boundary between getaway and confinement in landscapes, or grappling with the eternal and ephemeral nature of time, they all underscore the paramount notion of duality. Whether between depicting and obscuring, recognizing and contextualizing, or wakefulness and sleep, its tension encapsulates the impossible coexistence of disparate narratives. And with each of them carrying profound personal meaning alongside familiar symbolism, they weave an inconstant tapestry of frail thoughts and ideas that the viewer gets tangled up in.

- Saša Bogojev, writer and curator

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rafal Topolewski (b.1983 Grudziadz, Poland) lives and works in Lisbon. He studied Fine Art at the Royal Academy Schools (London, UK) and at the Manchester Metropolitan University. Selected solo and two-person exhibitions include: 'Smoulder', GRIMM Gallery, New York, USA (2025); 'Slumber', GRIMM Gallery, Amsterdam (2024); 'Interludes', Alice Amati, London (2023); 'If Not, Winter', Simo Bacar, Lisbon (2022); 'Isle, Lewis Hammond and Rafal Topolewski', Smart Objects, Los Angeles (2018). His work has been exhibited in the group shows 'Urban Dwellers', curated by Lawrence Van Hagen, The Painting Rooms, London, UK (2025); 'Fragment II', COMMUNE, Vienna (2025); 'A Room Hung With Thoughts: British Painting Now', The Green family Art Foundation, Dallas (2025); 'Self-Portraits', GRIMM, New York (2024); 'The Belly And The Guts', Alice Amati, London (2023); 'In Three-Acts', Huxley Parlour, London (2023); 'Becoming Creature', Tabula Rasa Gallery, London (2023); 'Castelet', Simo Bacar, Lisbon (2022); 'Corpo e Mente', curated by Lawrence Van Hagen, Palazzo Barbaro, Venice (2022); 'Nudes and Dudes', Lundgren Gallery, Mallorca (2020); 'Terraforms', The Concept Space, London (2018); 'Adolf Menzel's Foot', PS Mirabel, Manchester (2017); 'Fully Awake', Blip Blip Blip, Leeds (2017); 'RA Schools Show', Royal Academy Schools, London (2016); 'Premiums Interim Projects', Royal Academy of Arts, London (2015) amongst others. His work is included in Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo ETS (Torino, Italy). Topolewski was an artist in residence at GARTEN, Bottéga Artist Residency 2025, (Como, IT).

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Alice Amati is a contemporary art gallery established in London in June 2023. The gallery is committed to fostering artists at the early stages of their careers, often providing opportunities for their first solo presentations in the city as well as on the international stage, while creating a supportive context for artistic exploration and career development.

The gallery's roster currently includes ten represented artists. Since its inception, the gallery has staged more than twenty exhibitions at its London location while also expanding its international presence through participation in numerous art fairs worldwide.

Concerned with encouraging transnational dialogues around topical questions within society and art, Alice Amati brings together British and international artists through a challenging, experimental, and rigorous exhibition programme. The gallery aims to operate as a platform for new voices in the contemporary global art scene, with a strong commitment to research, collaboration, and diverse artistic practices.

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