



Welcome to our clash pad

Should you hang contemporary paintings on candy-pink walls? Absolutely, say interior designer Rachel Chudley and gallerist Victoria Williams. By Victoria Woodcock

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAKE CURTIS

The National Gallery doesn't want them. The Musée d'Orsay did away with them in 2011. And when MoMA opened its renovated gallery spaces last year it followed suit, transforming its standard Super White walls with bluish-tinged Cabbage White, Sulking Room Pink and deep-blue Serge (among other hues) from Farrow & Ball. "It's no longer taken for granted that you need a white wall to pay reverence to an artwork," says interior designer Rachel Chudley, whose projects are typically laden with colour and dotted with contemporary artworks – often sourced through her friend and collaborator Victoria Williams, the director of London's Cob Gallery.

"An abstract painting inspired the entire colour scheme of this room," says Williams of a room in the Highgate home of photographer Lucy Tudhope and her music producer husband Adam – one of Chudley's latest projects. "Rachel worked with specialist paint-maker Donald Kaufman [who is also, conveniently, her father-in-law] to create the bespoke

in-law] to create the bespoke wall colours."

The painting in question is by Joseph Goody, one of the emerging artists represented by Cob, whose work Chudley has in her own home. In the Highgate house, two of his colourful explorations of shape and form hang against cornflower-blue in the hallway, while a larger work

"INTERIORS AND ART SHOULD BOTH BE AN EXTENSION OF YOUR PERSONALITY"

dominates the dining area, its subtly two-tone pistachio and pale-pink walls offset with a pop of sea green on the skirting boards. "We created the three different colours to work with the painting," says Chudley of the space, which features a vast antique Irish farmhouse table, a brass-inlaid concrete floor and sweeping hand-dyed linen curtains in a dusky rose ombre. "The colours all reference the artwork without mimicking them," she adds.

Other Cob gallery artists make an appearance in the house. A picture from Jason Shulman's chromatic *Photographs of Films* series – created by setting the exposure time on his camera to capture the entire length of a film in one image – stands out against a whimsical Melissa White for Zoffany wallpaper in the living room.



Victoria Williams (far left) and Rachel Chudley in the hallway of one of Chudley's recent projects in Highgate, with two works by Joseph Goody (both *Untitled*) hung against walls of custom-mixed paint

In the main bedroom, the colours of Lorena Lohr's stylised photographs of Florida dissolve into the pale-pink walls.

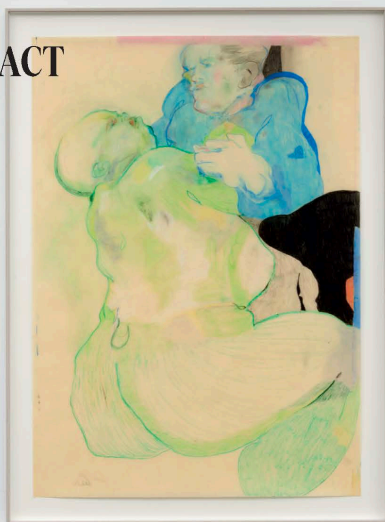
"Art should be an extension of your personality, as should your interior. The two have a symbiotic relationship," Williams says.

The latter could also be said of Williams and Chudley, who refer to each other throughout most of our conversation as "Nutt" and "Chud". "We met in our early 20s through a mutual friend, the playwright Polly Stenham, whom I went to university with," says Williams. "Back then we all lived together in Polly's house." In 2011, Williams and Stenham established Cob Gallery as an artist-led project space, which included pop-ups of Guts For Garters, the former Camden art-meets-design-meets-fashion store that Chudley set up with her friend Cassie Beadle – now the curator at Cob. The same year, the duo showed an exhibition titled *Anatomy Dinner*, which featured paintings



Top left: *Photographs of Films: Wizard of Oz (1939)*, 2016, by Jason Shulman, set against wallpaper by Melissa White for Zoffany. Above: *Untitled*, 2018, by Lorena Lohr

DOUBLE ACT



Above: *Eglantine*, 2020, by Cat Roissetter. Left: *Santa En Oração*, 2017, by Alida Cervantes. Right: *Soon III: The Death of Paqurri*, 2013, by Nina Mae Fowler. Below: Chudley and Williams with Joseph Goody's *Line*, 2015, set against a bespoke two-tone wall

of skulls and vintage Vivienne Westwood dresses, but also hosted a five-course meal where a starter of cold meats was served on the body of a naked woman before guests helped to prepare the main course by plucking and gutting partridges and pheasants.

If this seems a far cry from Chudley's current role as an interior designer, what remains is a sense of experimentation and fun. "It's a crazy combination," says Chudley, who studied art history at the Courtauld Institute. "When I became an interior designer, I didn't think this older part of my life would play a part, but actually all these layers influence your style. We think about each project as a creative endeavour – artwork and bespoke design is an essential part of the process."

One of Chudley's first projects after establishing her studio in 2015 was for the theatre performer and writer Rachel May Snider, where both the living room and kitchen were painted a show-stopping, candy-pop pink, with artworks throughout. She also rethought Stenham's Grade II-listed Bloomsbury home, and while the overall design is sensitive and somewhat stately, the artworks are charged with sensuality: a cyanotype portrait by Eloise Fornieles (a multimedia artist whose collective performance group is called The Perverts) sits between two sinuous panelled walls concealing secret bathrooms. A couple of John Kacere's cheeky, cropped photorealist paintings of women's bottoms – from Stenham's father's collection – peek above the door frames.

"Working with Rachel is much more collaborative than simply adding works to walls," says Williams. "Her clients spend time at the gallery, see our exhibitions and visit artist studios. One person, for instance, got really



excited by the work of Cat Roissetter, which looks a little like Japanese shunga drawings but very British. She had a show at Cob called *English Filth*, which references her approach – she sluices paper with olive oil, works into it with graphite and basically really dirties it up." As well as owning a series of her drawings, the client has just commissioned Roissetter to make a stained-glass window that will be incorporated into the panelling of a doorway.

Chudley is also just completing her first project in the US – a double-aspect apartment high above New York's Fifth Avenue, whose owner "has the most incredible art

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collection of masterpieces". Due to the bright natural light throughout, his pieces can only be hung in one room, which has led to "a very exciting conversation with Victoria". The installation, meanwhile, will be managed by Chudley via Zoom. "It's a brave new world that I'm not quite sure I'm enjoying," she says. "It's just not the same as being in the room."

But while the crisis has brought about challenges for Chudley and her team – "I spent a lot of time searching for plaster on eBay. You just couldn't get hold of it. It was the interior design version of loo roll" – it has also sparked a "crazy interior design rush", says Chudley. "We've had more enquiries for new jobs during this period than ever before."

Williams, too, has found that thus far business has held steady, with Cob curating exhibitions specifically for online. "In April, we put together a show called *Escape Fantasy* by the American artist Frances Waite, who works in pencil," she says. "Her drawings are all about the apocalypse, so we thought that was nicely timed." This month, Cob is presenting Mexican artist Alida Cervantes' figurative paintings at online art fair Untitled, Art Miami Beach, while also releasing work from Tomo Campbell and Faye Wei Wei – whose paintings both feature in a just-finished Chudley scheme in London.

Where will their collaboration take them next? "Why don't we do a hotel together?" suggests Chudley, adding that she'd also love to bring more sculpture into her designs. "Cob has done lots of work with Meekyoung Shin, who makes the most insanely beautiful replicas of antique Chinese vases but made out of soap. I'm absolutely obsessed with her work." Williams would like to ramp up the sculptural scale further and "do a project that has land, so that we can go monumental outside". Now appears to be the time for big and bold. Chudley has found her clients more open to her wilder ideas. "It's that apocalyptic, end-of-the-world thing," she concludes. "People seem to be saying: 'What's the point of being modest?'" ■ HTSI cobgallery.com. rachelchudley.com

