

swell over bough

swell over bough is an exhibition that traces figures around air.

In sail or chest under garment or within a silk balloon, air is given visible form by its temporary clothing. This exhibition of paintings seeks to meet a chaotic world with calmness - to step down from imminence and to look with soft eyes at something profoundly simple.

There are four loose figurative themes in the paintings - sails, conversation, scientific balloons and the qualities of light passing through air. These might seem unconnected, and I cede that on the surface it is not obvious. The thread that binds them is of air contained and changed - given meaning by our arresting or holding of it for a moment.

With sails, our human urge for discovery and for working with the world on it's rather than our terms.

With conversation, the complexity and beauty of our impossible existence - both animal and civil forms existing in the same body and somehow having to make this contradiction make sense. Conversation here standing for language, for the gaps of understanding between us that get bridged so imperfectly between one another by words borne only by air. How agonising!

With Balloons, our discovery of levity within scientific curiosity, and how these strange bedfellows can be both clownish and deadly serious, and how changing the properties of a medium can elevate it and give it purpose.

Lastly and most vaguely - with the occlusion or suffusion of light, how air itself becomes the vessel of meaning - a spotlight makes the subject but also makes the scene, and those within it are given a temporary cloak which can be worn as valour or humility - it depends on the wearer.

Swell over bough hopes to offer a step down from the brink of catastrophe and gloom into a simple refrain - something true and easy, carried on the air.

John Ward Knox, March 2026