

Critics' choice

Life&Arts

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Gary Hume: MUM

Sprüth Magers, London

There was always something recalling childhood in Hume's minimalist, clear picture-book world of flowers, birds and snowmen, but his latest series, Mum delivers a newly rich emotional charge. As usual, the paintings are large, flat, shiny, vertical, starkly graphic though tending to abstraction, attractive yet disconcerting: luscious bronze flowers floating just out of reach of a wobbly vase in "Mother's Day"; a flurry of turquoise leaves, dancing, wilting, falling on a grey mound in "Graved". In the context of Mum, these almost-still lifes in enamel on aluminium, reflecting the viewer, tap themes of recollection, loss, absence, painting's relationship to time: poignant and metaphysical.

Mum was made in response to Hume losing his mother to the fog of dementia, and marvellously contrasts fading memories and vanishing presences with strikingly direct childhood perceptions. "Cheap Sweets" is a two-metre

red and white striped canvas with a couple of bright blots, evoking a child's delight in artificial colour, garish packaging, the grandeur of small delights. This is executed in thick gloss paint on paper that ripples like a crinkled wrapper.

Paper here gives lavish tactile effects: "Mum's Cardigan", with five big white buttons on pink, at first calls to mind a Hume snowman but the crumpled, worn surfaces are exactly what a snuggling child would remember. By contrast, works on aluminium are smooth, subtly evocative, and play on light to imply shifting realities: the fragment of an old lady's head on a pillow, eyes closed, but still animating the abstract shapes of the painting in "Mum in Bed"; the blue-violet silhouette "Mum" where facial features can only be seen from certain angles, so we feel the gaps, a haze between us and the subject and, as Hume says, "Mum's distance from herself". *spruethmagers.com, to December 23*



'Graved',
(2017)
by Gary
Hume