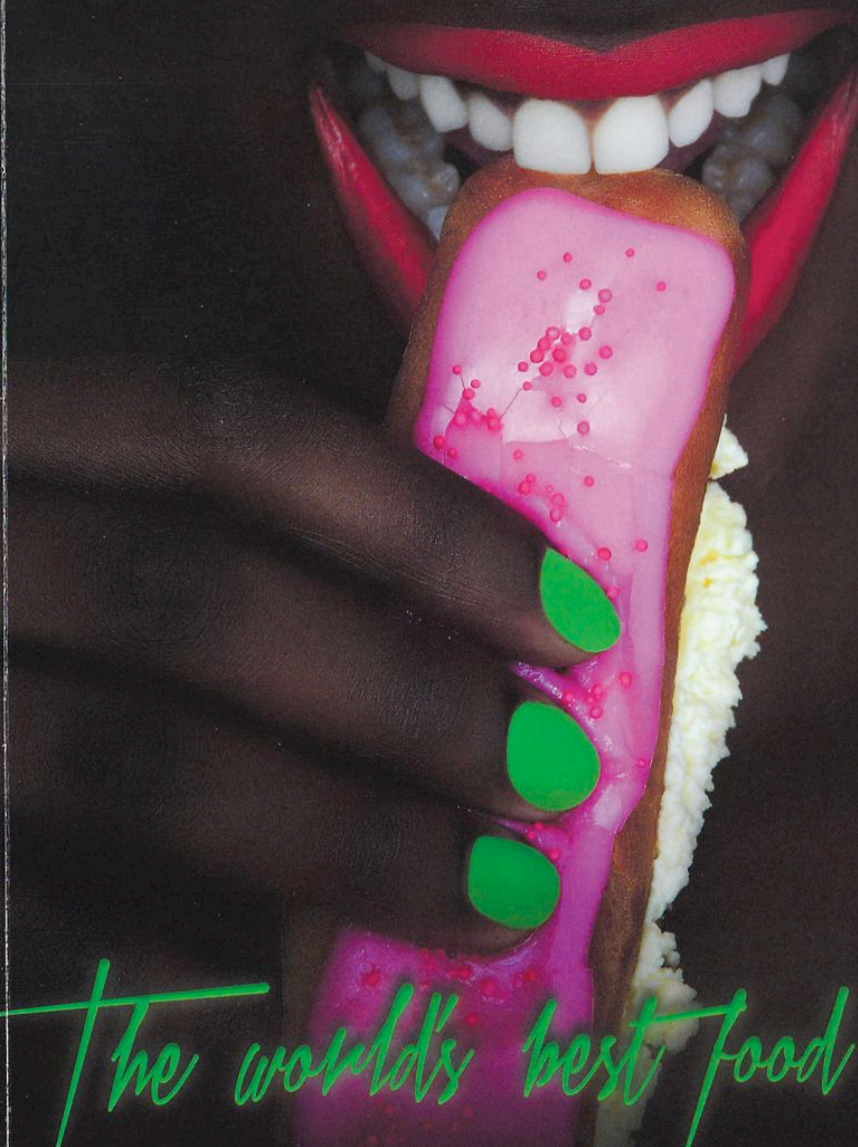


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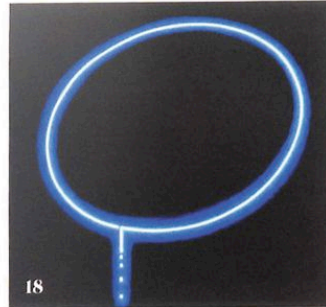
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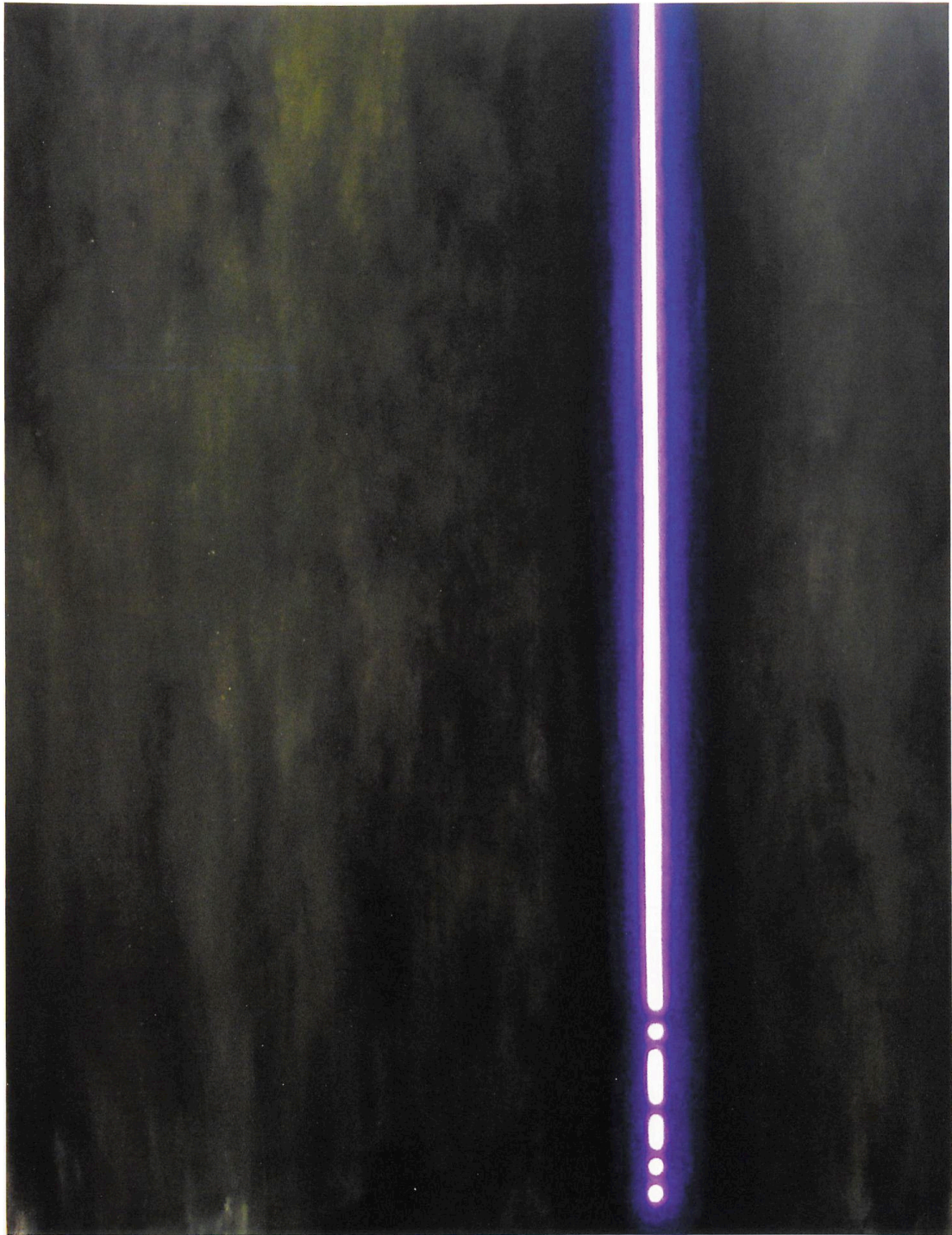
# CITY OF NEON

Capturing the flickering, incandescent qualities of neon lights, Dominic Bradnum uses his unique talent to play with the viewer's perceptions, writes **Eva-Luise Schwarz**

**D**ominic Bradnum is a name we're going to hear much more of in the coming years. It's happening big-time for this young British artist who just emerged from a sell-out exhibition of his works at 45 Park Lane in London's glittering Mayfair.

Listening to Dominic talk about oil paintings, building layers and glazes, taking advantage of the slow drying times to blend pigment and creating subtle changes of tone and contrast, doesn't give any indication that only last year, his art played second, even third fiddle in his life.

Graduating from art school, his artistic mind needed space. He says: "It was such an intense experience, working and working and working, that I came out of art school and thought, I don't want to see whatever I've been doing for a very long time." He found another creative outlet in music and formed a band, took a job in an office and that was that. But not really—his creative juices continued flowing: "I had this tedious office job and I started doodling on post-it notes. I kept doing it and put them in a drawer, taking them home every now and then. After six years I had nearly 2,000 of them. At school I got this mindset that everything or anything could feed into an artwork in some way and this is just what happened. I ended up keeping all these post-it notes and in 2011 featured them in an exhibition called Work/Work about how artists balance >>





their creative work with a paid job. It took six years to make and two days for two people to install the artwork of 1,966 post-it notes on a huge wall." Every single one was different and patterns kept emerging, showing beauty in the mundane.

However, Dominic's biggest passion is and was neon, a theme going back to his first year at art school where he tried to capture bright light and that certain after-image that gets burned onto your retina. Back then they were more abstract neon forms floating across the canvas, which developed into a more text-based style later on.

In 2006, after not having painted for years, Dominic suddenly got inspired: "I had food poisoning and was ill for 48 hours. I came out of this feverish dream with all these ideas for neon paintings, which I hadn't done for six or seven years. That's when I decided that I needed to get back to painting. Later on that summer I quit my office job and went back to my family empire making jigsaws a couple of days a week so that I could do some painting and it gradually increased up until last year."

Dominic's paintings take on an optical, almost transient quality, playing with the viewer's perceptions as they seem to shimmer across the surface of the canvas. The subject matter often takes form as textual musings—bright neon slogans loaded with meaning. Asked if it's hard to commit to certain words on canvas, he explains: "Obviously you invest a lot of time in a piece and you have to have the conviction to have a message that may be misread in some way." His messages are at the same time potent and vague, innocuous

**"I came out of this feverish dream with all these ideas for neon paintings... that's when I decided that I needed to get back to painting."**

and enigmatic. He references pop songs and pop art, playful and evocative one-liners like "Wish you were here" or "Kiss me quick", plaintive thoughts or abstract or minimalist forms. "To distill a poetic sentiment in a snappy phrase is a very difficult thing," says Dominic. "Everyone who sees that message reads something into it and has their view of what the sentiment is. It's a knife's edge." Referencing the past via nods to modern art history is Dominic's way of acknowledging what's gone before. The drip paintings, for example, reference the artist Barnett Newman, an abstract expressionist whose motif was a zip—a line which bisected all of his paintings in that series.

Referencing Roy Orbison, also known as The Big O, Dominic paid homage to this great American singer-songwriter in his recent painting *Crying Over You*, a blue neon circle floating in space, almost pouring away off the canvas.

His epic seascapes and windswept beaches, on the other hand, are reminiscent of Turner, evoking a bitterly cold and windy beach, capturing the winter bleakness of seaside towns around his native England. The sea is the colour of churned-up mud and murky green, washing foam and spume onto the beach. "I like the idea that it was a bleak picture postcard view with the message 'Wish you >>

**PREVIOUS PAGE**  
*Drip 2 (For Barnett Newman)*, 2010, oil on canvas, 130cm x 80cm.

**ABOVE** *The Last Bastion Of Hope*, 2014, oil and mixed media on canvas, 100cm x 150cm.

**NEXT PAGE TOP** *Wish You Were Here*, 2010, oil and mixed media on canvas, 118cm x 165cm.

**NEXT PAGE BOTTOM** *What's New Pussycat?*, 2006, oil on canvas, 92cm x 92cm.

## ART



were here' as the archetypal phrase you write on the back of postcards. The follow-up companion piece I'm working on at the moment is this beach with a foaming sea and horrid slate grey sky and this eye-popping red neon that says 'Kiss me quick'. I wanted to capture that elemental overwhelming force of nature."

For the neon element, Dominic relies on the strong contrast of bright lettering of forms and the subtle glow into darkness, reminiscent of the Renaissance technique of chiaroscuro's contrasts of light and dark. For the backdrop, Dominic looks for inspiration in his fascination with urban decay and finds beauty in water-stained concrete walls and crumbling buildings.

In October last year, Dominic submitted one of his paintings for an open exhibition, the Wells Art Contemporary 2013, and was not only accepted, but won first prize, part of which was an exhibition at 45 Park Lane in London. Dominic's life changed instantly: "It was quite a dramatic change really. My wife and I [had] just had a daughter and I'd been working at home a lot. But there wasn't anywhere for me to paint in the house, which meant I had to find a studio space. And now I've won a prize and sold all 20 pieces in the exhibition..." The world of artists such as Peter Blake, who was showing at 45 Park Lane, and Damien Hirst, who has a permanent exhibition in its restaurant CUT, Wolfgang Puck's first restaurant in Europe, has unfurled. "It's been a bit of a whirlwind few months since last October, but now I've rolled up my sleeves and I'm getting back into it again with two exhibitions later on this year to concentrate on. It's quite liberating having



a sold-out show because it clears the decks and lets you regroup."

With his paintings now gracing private collections from Geneva to London, Beirut to Dublin, it only remains to be seen who is going to snap him up first for gallery representation. **L**