Let us suppose that we are visiting an exhibition of work by this artist. All we know about him is his name and what we see. We have entered the gallery and seen two sculptures—figurines or statuettes; one strangely Gothic, yet skewed into the contemporary, disquieting, the other surrealistically Classical, bringing to mind the myths surrounding metamorphosis, science fiction, a curious psycho-sexual masque. And then we turn, and we are looking directly into the inscrutable gaze of a modern-looking young woman.

Somehow the gravitational field created by this (imagined) selection of works, all by Brooks, begins to deepen and thicken with strangeness and ambiguity. A cluster of transmissions—sex loudest, perhaps, but the frequencies of this art-making seem to chop and change like the lights flickering on a remote rural circuit.

Turn again, and the first sight of an Origin painting (in landscape format) declaims itself: a seeming molten, liquefying, congealing, drooling, dripping, flaring and trailing chaos of ridges and deltas and novas and marbled accretions of alternately Stygian and industrially-bright multi-coloured paints.

What first? The sensory impact is visceral and immediate. Colour becomes sensually tactile, as though inviting touch—for the fingers to luxuriate in the oozing mass, as much as the eye delights in the ripples and swirls and pendulous tongues and comet-trails of paint. All seems to proclaim movement—a happiness explosion, an orgiastic freak-out, a grand liberation.... In Origin I, for example, entering top left, a livid trail, widening and thickening and glistening to descend like a black relief map of a mountain range, down the centre of the painting. Here it seems as though the children’s party of riotous colour has suddenly been taken up by the adults, with more determined, more dissolute intention. We may have the impression of a gouging, erupting, climactic opening up.... To either side the liquid colours seem to mimic, first, psychedelic oil-on-water light shows, and then a map of the Aegean Sea as seen from the edge of space. Flares and tributaries branch off and away....

Standing back, their gaze somehow drawn to focus on this central, gleaming descent of blackness, the viewer becomes aware (if they weren’t already) of two lines, diagonally descending from left and right towards this dark centre of the painting. Look longer at the globular, dripping smears of colour that descend from these lines, and their further shape and solidity appears to become increasingly legible. Irrepressibly, the painting seems more sexual than sensual, insinuating primal desire as much as primal chaos.

Returning to this imagined exhibition, having added Origin I to the experience of Brooks’ work, a viewer might first realise the manner in which the artist appears to be largely indifferent, conceptually, to the distinctions between abstraction and figuration. His motives seem not to be shaped by either representation or the deconstruction of representation. Rather, his work might resemble...
the object-residue of an addiction to process, in which process conflates desire, satiation, surface, tension, release and texture.

In its seeming—perhaps imagined, possibly intended—intimation of raw sexual and libidinal energy, this series of *Origin* paintings might be descended from Courbet’s notorious painting *The Origins of the World*, 1866, in which a woman’s parted legs and explicitly revealed genitalia are depicted in a manner which seems crypto-mystical, celebratory, pornographic, curious, mesmerised and imbued with some strange mix of lust and faint repulsion. As potential descendants of Courbet’s painting, by contrast this series might seem to come from a colder, faster and far more impersonal age.

But are these romantic paintings? Positing pure abstraction, yet seemingly holding back from declaring an allegiance to any particular or distinct aesthetic or ideological mannerism, they first confound Romanticism in its erotic (classical) form, and then become colder and stranger. Like other excursions made by Brooks into abstraction—or representations of abstraction—there seems on further speculation to be a sense in which these paintings steer a steady course between nihilism and anarchy. For example, consider first the negation of subject; second, the impossibility of allowing the gaze to rest with any certainty on a particular point of focus; third, the illusion of surface and fourth, the impossibility of projecting any ‘meaning’ onto these works, save for an acknowledgement of sensory stimulus and interpretive provocation. In short, the *Origin* paintings appear to owe no allegiance to any cause save stimulation—and therein, perhaps, lies their ‘point’.

There is a mysterious or enigmatic quality to this artist’s work. The sense of image selection seems at once profound and arbitrary—almost as though ‘subject’ was a means of enabling him to carry out some activity, the alibis for which are painting, drawing and conceptualising. This mystery has a coldness at its core and a certain brutality or ruthlessness. Brooks appears to refract his selected subjects through an art-making process that is as indifferent to their ‘identity’ (philosophical or material) as it is committed to its own undeclared but deeply felt intentions. These intentions being...?
Origin II (Text), 2015, 76.4 x 57.5 cm, acrylic and graphite on paper
Origin III (Text), 2015, 76.4 × 57.5 cm, acrylic and graphite on paper
Origin III, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 125 × 176 cm
Origin IV (Test), 2015, 76.4 × 57.5 cm, acrylic and graphite on paper
Origin V (Test), 2015, 76.4 × 57.5 cm, acrylic and graphite on paper
Origin VI (Text), 2015, 76.4 × 57.5 cm, acrylic and graphite on paper
Studio view: Origin VII and Origin VIII in progress
Jason Brooks

Born
1968, Rotherham, England

Lives and works
London

Education
1988–91 BA Fine Art, Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Art & Design, Cheltenham

Solo Exhibitions
2015 Origins, Marlborough Contemporary, London
2013 Ultra Flesh, Marlborough Contemporary, London
2006 Stellan Holm Gallery, New York
2005 Auto, Max Wigram Gallery, London
2002 Archimede Staffalini Gallery, Nicosia
2001 Harewood House, Harewood, Leeds
2000 Entwistle, London
1998 Entwistle, London

Group Exhibitions
2015 I never thought I’d see you again: Painting History, Marlborough Contemporary, London
2012–13 Beyond Reality, British Painting Today, Galerie Rudofinum, Prague
2011 Do You Believe?, 3bta Contemporary Art Projects, Hong Kong
2010 Straw Dogs, Spring Projects, London
2009 Capturing Claudia, Colnaghi Gallery, London
2008 Unforgiven, Stellan Holm Gallery, New York
2007 Timer, Triennale Bovisa, Milan
2005 Darkness Visible, Ferrers Art Gallery, Hull & Southampton City Art Gallery
2004 John Moores 23, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
2003 Yes! I am a long way from home, The Nunnery, London and UK tour
2001 I am a Camera, The Saatchi Gallery, London
2000 Psycho Same, Lombard Frield, New York

Awards/Residencies
1999 The NatWest Art Prize (winner)
1997 John Moores Painting Prize (joint-winner)
1994 British Telecom, London (residency)
1990 British School, Rome (residency)

Collections
ABN AMRO, London
The Berardo Collection, Museum of Modern Art, Lisbon
Brandes Family Collection, Tel Aviv
British Telecom, London
Cheltenham and Gloucester Building Society, Cheltenham
Cheltenham
Cohen Collection, Cheshire
Coopers & Lybrand, London
Cranford Collection, London
Dakis Joannou/Deste Foundation Collection, Athens
Harewood House, Harewood, Leeds
James Moores Collection, Liverpool
JPMorgan Chase Art Collection, London
Lenhardt Collection, Arizona
National Portrait Gallery, London
Neuberger Berman, New York
Paulina Paraskevaidou Collection
The Saatchi Gallery, London
The Speyer Collection, New York
Swagemakers Collection, Netherlands
Unilever, London
Walk Art Gallery, Liverpool
William Morris Agency, Los Angeles

Collections
1999 Painting Lab, Entwistle, London
The NatWest Art Prize 1999, Lathbury Gallery, London
The Flower Show, Harewood House, Harewood, Leeds
John Moores art, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
Fresh Paint, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow National Dependency, Jerwood Gallery, London
Postcards on Photography, Cambridge Darkroom, Cambridge and UK tour
Near, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah
1997 Likeness: Representing Sexualities, Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester
John Moores 20, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
1996 Trojan, Paton Gallery, London
1995 Fellows’ Show, Pittville Gallery, Cheltenham
1994 Pat Show, 63 Union Street, London & UK Masks, Safo Gallery, London
BT Commission, Waterloo Station, London
1993 To Boldly Go..., Cubitt Gallery, London
BT New Contemporaries, Serpentine Gallery, London and UK tour
1992 Abstractions from the Domestic Suburb Scena (SIN), Benjamin Rhodes Gallery, London

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