

True Fiction

4 December 2024 to 31 January 2025

An exhibition of works by ten figurative artists.



Shane Berkery, *Induced Levitation*, 2024, oil on canvas, 152cm x 122cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

LONDON, 4 December, 2024 – JGM Gallery presents *True Fiction*, an exhibition of works by ten figurative artists.

True Fiction explores the means through which the exhibiting artists abstract their subject, so as to convey a deeper and more wholistic understanding of it. Partly inspired by JGM Gallery's summer exhibition, *Revelation & Concealment*, which sought to uncover hidden aspects of the natural world, *True Fiction* turns instead toward the anthropocentric, examining the ways in which texture, composition and line, amongst other formal elements, may divulge complexities in the figure beyond superficial representation. It is the aim of this exhibition, as Francis Bacon once said, to "... trap appearance without making an illustration of it..." and to affirm this as one "... of the great excitements of being a figurative artist..." (Francis Bacon, in conversation with William Burroughs, 1982).

In his charcoal drawing, *Pleasure Peak*, and his heavily impastoed oil painting, *Dance Dun*, Cai Arfon Bellis depicts inner-city London raves. Often produced on location, and in the midst of this communal commotion, Bellis blends exceptional draughtsmanship with the spontaneous interactions he has with those around him. Bellis translates accidental collisions or the spillage of someone's drink into figurative

abstractions, which he uses to emphasise or blur the individuality of his subject, and to capture the dynamism of the event.

The degree to which Shane Berkery deviates from realism is in many ways analogous to the indistinctness of memory. It is in the ways we embellish or forget aspects of our personal narrative that Berkery believes the most compelling imagery is to be found. In *Induced Levitation* the detailed rendering of certain objects, such as a toaster and pot lodged on the kitchenette bench, dissipate into preliminary outlines and sketches. Proportions are skewed and certain objects take compositional precedence over others. Paradoxically, this style of representation, though less than factually accurate, feels more vivid, for it mimics the ways in which the viewer might recall events from their own life. Moreover, the positioning of the figure – face down and suspended inches from the floor – charges this piece with the supernatural, and the omission of the subject's face induces a subtle trepidation in the viewer.

Memory and the way it can, within the mind's eye, intensify or distort past events, is also a key aspect of Konstantinos Argyroglou's largely autobiographical work. Painted with a pseudo-naivety, *Aeroplane Memory*, *Beyond Myself* and *Grandpa's Easter Dinner* possess a tender aesthetic that is consistent with their representation of moments from the artist's childhood. Blotched watercolour markings often contrast with hard-edged forms, such variations in the application of paint reminiscent of a domestic arts practice or the world viewed through a child's gaze. As with Berkery's work, there is a correlation between this style of figuration and the vagueness of memory.

The Tempest, a ceramic vessel depicting figures within a landscape, marks a significant stylistic progression for Tom Norris, wherein he combines the expressive mark-making that defined much of his earlier work with a newly adopted collage process. The collaged sections, often cut from photographs, are representational, however, as fragments they deny the viewer a complete impression of the original image. They thus appear like windows amongst the forested landscape which dominates much of the vessel's remaining surface area. Their disconnection from each other and from the rest of the gesturally rendered composition, establishes them more as formal, rather than representational, components of the work. In this way, Norris prioritises an overall

harmonious aesthetic, rather than an image that invites narrative rationalisation.

Titling her photographs with haikus – *Circles In The Sand*, *Mirror The Spiralling Feet* and *In The Clouds Above* – Mina Fairchild takes inspiration from a Japanese poetic tradition which emphasises simplicity, intensity and directness of expression. These images of a figure in a landscape, enveloped within a tempestuous fan of silk, achieve this and more. The subject's outline takes on an auratic quality and she almost blends into the landscape around her. This is in many ways consistent with haiku poetry, which predominantly addresses the natural world and our connection to it. In an interesting inversion of this tradition, however, Fairchild presents these images in a distinctly industrial guise: black and white film photography on sheets of aluminium. In this there is an intriguing contrast between form and content.

In *Simius*, Gala Hills sublimates her childhood remembrances and daydreams into an idealised, imagined world. Ostensibly perturbing aspects of the image – the approach of a bear, a spectral squirrel monkey, or the voyeuristic gaze of a male figure – are offset by Hills' feathered brushstrokes and scumbling, as well as the optimistic palette of light greens, blues and pinks. That is, danger is presented to the audience, but through Hills' style of figuration, in a tongue and cheek way. The composition recalls Diego Velazquez' *Las Meninas*, wherein the Infanta Margarita is dotingly attended to by members of the Spanish court, as she herself breaks the fourth wall, staring out toward the viewer. In *Simius*, this eye contact with the central figure – perhaps representative of the artist as a young girl – establishes her as the mediator between the real and the unreal, the pictorial logic of this monumental canvas and the world inhabited by its audience.

By covering his subject's head in *Social Fabric I*, Julius Killerby makes an abstraction of the face, but one which corresponds with his sitter's facial features. In this way, he balances the anonymity of the subject with a representational depiction of them. This anonymity, moreover, universalises the figure, perhaps prompting the viewer to put themselves in the subject's shoes. People pushed to painful extremes feature in much of Killerby's recent work. Explorations of this theme are intended to capture that which he believes to be most distinct about humanity – the capacity to transcend suffering and instinct through abstract thought. Though apparently secular images, these works are thus informed by Christian iconography and depictions of martyrdom. The compositional conventions of these traditions – that of a pyramidal structure, imbued with a sense of ascension – are also utilised in *Self Portrait*, in which the artist's visage is blurred, capturing him in a moment of heightened sensation. The shadow – conspicuously static in comparison to the animated figure that casts it – serves as a poignant reminder of the dualities inherent in human existence, and the states of being we have the capacity to experience and transcend.

Cayetano Sanz de Santamaria's work, *First Fruits For The Son Of Bachué*, is dominated by the side profile of a colossal Brahman bull, which the artist deifies as the son of Bachué, a Goddess in Muisca mythology. Originating from the Altiplano Cundiboyacense, a high altitude plain in modern day Colombia, the story of Bachué's son describes a virile being which, prior to procreating, was nourished with the first fruits of the season. Through Santamaria's lens, the story takes on an especially eerie quality. Upon an Arcadian grassland, three emaciated figures tend to the bull, two of them bearing fruit, the other caressing his side in a gesture that seems to both glorify and objectify the beast. Through their ritualistic masks, the eyes of these skeletal caretakers appear dumbfounded, a distinct contrast with the dignified and penetrating gaze of the bull, literally God-like by comparison. As with Gala Hills' work, eye contact with the viewer establishes the bull as the painting's focal point, and the preeminent character in this magical realist imagining.

Creatures of the earth, often on the brink of maturation, are a recurring subject for Huddie Hamper, a painter and printmaker from Chatham, Kent. We find these animals in transitory moments, often alluded to by their surroundings as much as their physical form. In *White Deer*, Hamper depicts a deer encountered at night in a landscape so flat and vast as to see the earth's curvature in it. Bioluminescence exudes from Hamper's subject, its liminality further underscored by a slight contrapposto stance and the image of a younger deer behind. He thereby emphasises the impermanent nature of the representation before us, and in his luminous and vaporous style, finds an analogue for the inevitable passage through stages of growth, change and, by implication, inevitable decline. Parallels are found with Hills and Santamaria's animalian dreamscapes, where archetypal figures are not presented as stringent icons, but are ambiguous and encourage multiple readings.

Richard Lewer's *14 October 2023* presents a poignant scene, featuring a solitary figure in a central Australian landscape, accompanied by three dogs. Produced in the context of the 'No' vote to Australia's Voice referendum, which the artwork's title explicitly references, Lewer's painting on brass is imbued with melancholy and pathos. The despondent central figure departs from the foreground, her turned back creating separation from the viewer, which thus suggests her alienation from Australia's political body. She instead withdraws into a vibrant landscape, the energy of which is enhanced by the sheen of the underlying brass. That is, Lewer uses this landscape as a metaphor for the figure's connection to the natural world, a symbolic approach

to painting that is very much consistent with the spirit of Indigenous contemporary art. Inspired by several journeys made by the artist into East Pilbara and Gunbalunya in East Arnhem Land, alongside members of the Parnngurr community, *14 October 2023* is an archetypal example of Lewer's practice, wherein he frequently combines personal narrative with broader societal implications.

True Fiction ultimately addresses the rich terrain between abstraction and representation, demonstrating the ways in which the exhibiting artists, through their deviations from literal depiction, convey ideas relating to memory, psychology, perception, time and politics, amongst a variety of other themes. In these figurative abstractions, the audience is offered equivalents for the uncertainties and mysteries of life, through which a more immersive and authentic connection to the world around us might be possible.

Exhibiting artists: Cai Arfon Bellis, Cayetano Sanz de Santamaria, Gala Hills, Huddie Hamper, Julius Killerby, Konstantinos Argyroglou, Mina Fairchild, Richard Lewer, Shane Berkery and Tom Norris.

About JGM Gallery

JGM Gallery was founded in 2017 by Australian-born Jennifer Guerrini Maraldi, one of the United Kingdom's leading specialists in Indigenous Australian Art. Guerrini Maraldi has more than 20 years experience in collecting, dealing and promoting Indigenous artists from across Australia.

Through its exhibition programme, JGM Gallery sheds light on the art and history of First Nations artists, with a focus on the use of sacred processes and traditional techniques. The gallery seeks to counter the pervasive and misplaced perception that the art of First Nations Australians is homogenous. In the words of Guerrini Maraldi, "The styles of this movement's leading figures are as varied, complex and sophisticated as any in the Western Canon." As well as championing Indigenous artists, the gallery has a roster of Contemporary artists from Britain and elsewhere. These artists reflect the multifaceted nature of the Contemporary art scene and, since its inception, JGM Gallery has promoted and placed their work in significant private and institutional collections.

Part of JGM Gallery's mission is to adequately contextualise the practices of the artists it represents. In alignment with this approach, it produces a variety of publications, with a focus on artist collaboration, editorial design, and scholarship. A commitment to publishing expands the gallery programme beyond its exhibitions – an ethos which fosters reflection and further conversation from our wider audience and community.

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For further information and press enquiries, please contact the gallery at info@jmgallery.com or + 44 (0) 207 228 6027.

Opening Reception:

4 December 2024, 6:30pm to 8:30pm
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