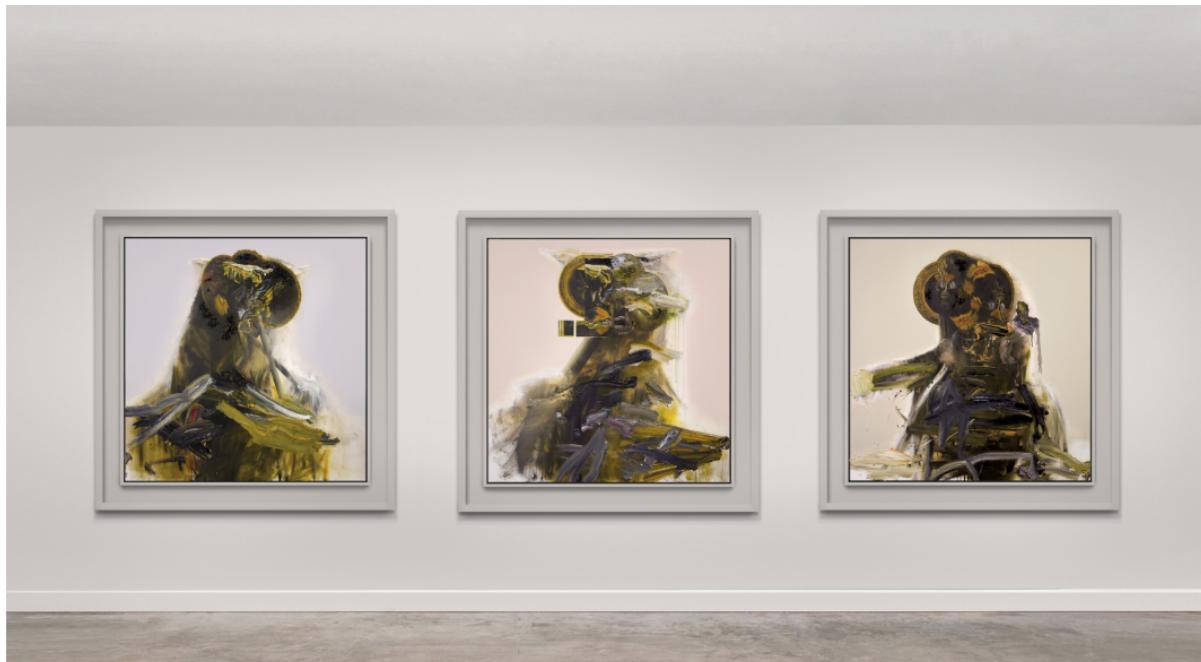




DAVID KIM WHITTAKER *THE FLESH TO THE FRAME*

Opera Gallery London
134 New Bond Street
From 2nd October 2017

Opera Gallery Paris
62 Rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré
From 26th October 2017



The Erinyes, 2017, oil and acrylic on canvas, 122 x 122 cm each

The directors of Opera Gallery are delighted to present two major exhibitions – in London and in Paris – by the acclaimed British artist David Kim Whittaker.

The first, entitled *The Flesh to the Frame (Part I: In the Existence)*, will take place at Opera's Mayfair premises, opening October 2nd, and the Paris show – (*Part 2: The Primal Vortex of Us*) – will follow later in the month at the gallery's Paris space, opening October 26th.

The London presentation – Whittaker's first solo show with the gallery – is comprised of more than 40 large, medium and small-scale oil and acrylic works. While a number of these featured in the artist's summer solo exhibition at the Fondazione Mudima, Milan, the majority have been created especially for these presentations.

Most of Whittaker's paintings are based around an interpretation of the human head and its metaphysical core. These portraits often juggle dual states of inner and outer calm and conflict – offering a glimpse of strength and fragility, the conscious and subconscious, the masculine and the feminine. These opposites are arguably reinforced by the artist's gender dysphoria, a condition where one's physical body does not match their deeper identity. This personal struggle, which saw Whittaker 'come out' 9 years ago, is a condition he/she has learned to live with through the endeavour of expressing something bigger than oneself through painting.

David Kim Whittaker's raw, visceral and yet highly worked paintings take us straight to the heart of questions of reality, mind, and embodiment. Canvases encrusted in swirling, physical, abstract brush marks are seemingly pierced by moments of clarity: detailed and realistic portraits of people and landscapes, either painted in acrylic used like watercolour, or as photographic collage applied directly onto the panel or canvas. These images are David Kim's compositional starting point: memories, dreams, moments of natural beauty, or images of human horror. Their sources are newspapers, paintings, and the artist's own life experiences, stored up, accumulated, overlapping and obscured, like the cuttings, postcards and art prints that cover every surface of the studio.

One of the featured works, a triptych entitled *The Lament* (2016), is illustrative. In the central canvas, the viewer's eye is drawn to two pastoral scenes inside painted oval, gold-rimmed frames. Closer inspection reveals these to be facsimiles of Constable's *The Hay Wain* (1821), reproduced at fractionally different moments in time, suggested by no more than a change in the wind. In the background an unidentified city burns, while the face of Christ's head wreathed in a crown of thorns stares heavenward. In the first and second canvases, the tension is heightened with images of shuffling hands and what appears to be Mary Magdalene's challenging stare. As with many of Whittaker's paintings, he then introduces an element of chaos, expressed with gestural and sometimes violent mark marking, overlaying and in some cases rendering invisible the representational elements of the works.

The theme of crucifixion occurs throughout David Kim's work. For the artist, life often feels like a series of daily crucifixions: a balanced struggle between the sometimes harsh realities of physical existence and those more ethereal and metaphysical dimensions that allow us to transcend it. This is reflected in his paintings, where sublime landscapes and bucolic rural idylls merge with exorcisms, soldiers and the victims of warfare and famine.

These same forces are evident in *Flesh to the Frame, the Paranoia Diva*, a single portrait work from 2017. An ominous note is struck by the blue/grey background – suggestive of a sky about to be ruptured by rainfall – that surrounds the outline of the head, rendered in ghostly washes. Here Whittaker introduces three overlapped cameos: one depicts a cathedral, perhaps Salisbury, painted as it would have looked three centuries ago; the other two are landscapes which break free of the frames and segue into dribbling layers of thick impasto paint, implying the uncontrollable power of nature, both literally and existentially.

In an essay for the Fondazione Mudima presentation, the curator and writer Joseph Clarke observes that the differing techniques of Whittaker's practice 'denote conflict but also manifest a place where fusion and harmony exist.' Inside this vortex, Whittaker creates a strange harmony, a world forged from his own imagination and memory but recognisable instantly to the viewer, too; unsettling, but comprehensible.

Both exhibitions will be accompanied by a catalogue with essays by Richard Davey and David Kim Whittaker.

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Notes to Editors:

About the artist (b.1964, Cornwall):

A self-taught artist, David Kim Whittaker has exhibited widely throughout the UK. He was elected a member of the Newlyn Society of Artists in 2009 and was the recipient of the Towry Award (First Prize) at the 2011 National Open Art Competition. In 2015, the critic Mattilda Battersby of *The Independent* described Whittaker as '*a mash-up of John Constable and Francis Bacon.*'

Recent solo exhibitions include: *A Portrait for Human Presence*, Fondazione Mudima, Milan (2017); *Nature of the Life Pavilions*, Millennium, St Ives (2014); *Bird in the Mammal House*, Millennium, St Ives (2013); *A Beautiful Kind of Certainty*, Anima-Mundi, St Ives (2011); and *Brief Moment in the Exposure*, Anima-Mundi, St Ives (2009). Group exhibitions include: *britARTnia*, Opera Gallery, London (2016); *The Discerning Eye*, Mall Galleries, London (2011); *NSA Exhibition*, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol (2009); and the Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy, London (2005). Whittaker lives and works in Newquay, Cornwall.

About Opera Gallery:

Founded by Gilles Dyan in Paris in 1994 and now internationally established with offices in Paris, London, Geneva, Monaco, New York, Miami, Aspen, Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul, Beirut and Dubai, Opera Gallery is one of the leading dealers in modern and contemporary art with museums as well as private clients worldwide.

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