

## MERLIN JAMES: *FAR AND NEAR*

September 8 – October 15, 2022  
Third Floor Gallery

Anton Kern Gallery is pleased to host two simultaneous presentations of the work of Merlin James, featuring new works among paintings from various points over the last four decades of his practice. James has created an expansive solo exhibition entitled *FAR AND NEAR* for the gallery's third floor space, and a concise two-painting installation for WINDOW in Tribeca. The gallery wishes to thank Sikkema Jenkins & Co. for their kind collaboration.



Reflecting on the two presentations, James writes: Merlin James, *Painting Castle (Red)*, 2022, Mixed media, 44 1/8 x 46 1/2 inches (112 x 118 cm)

*My exhibitions often show recent works alongside ones dating back years, or decades. I might work on individual paintings over equally extended periods. At WINDOW I'm showing 'Castle (Red)', a canvas from c.1985, when I was a postgraduate at the Royal College of Art in London. It's juxtaposed to a new work, 'Painting Castle (Red)', which appears to depict my young self, making the earlier picture.*

Ruins, and buildings or interiors of a certain vintage recur across James's work. The exhibition includes *Toll Booth* from c.1986, depicting an archaic turnpike building, and *Interior with Dried Flowers* (1990) with its 'period' furnishings and air of a time preserved or frozen. Several smaller paintings in the show are recently reworked fragments from a large early '90s interior painting. Cropping down compositions is a frequent strategy for the artist; also adding to and enlarging works, with cuts, seams and other evidence of re-stretching being common.

James comments: *That '90s interior had been partly a depiction of where I was living at the time – in Shoreditch, London – but partly also an imagined place. And the new paintings, made from the old one, partly depict where I live today, in Glasgow. (But whether or not the viewer wants to know all that...)*

Another recurring element in James's pictures is the image of an artist, either in the act of painting (e.g. *Painter (Red)*, 1986, Tate; *Two Figures*, 2021, Arts Council England; *Estuary*, 2014, MAM Paris), or as a sort of surrogate painter, like the guitar players in the current exhibition. *Photo*, 2022, depicting a guitar player and a little girl with a ukulele, was painted from the memory of a family photograph, probably taken the year James was born. *Horizon and Figure* (2015), and *Guitar* (2021-22) are likenesses of individuals, but who they might portray is not specified.

The closeness and distance of the show's title are at once spatial, temporal and emotional. There are paintings that seem more universal and perhaps impersonal – of the sea, or the sky with stars or moon. There are paintings of piers and headlands, connecting land and sea; paintings of anonymous places, and paintings that are hard to read figuratively but still suggesting the interiors and landscapes we occupy.

James observes: *Just seeing things, looking at the world we find ourselves in – is itself already a kind of image making. We actively describe to ourselves what we see, mentally depicting it. Making paintings, and looking at them, in turn is a kind of compound consciousness, an awareness of being aware. It intensifies our sense of being alive, in time.*

For additional images and information, please contact: [press@antonkerngallery.com](mailto:press@antonkerngallery.com).

Merlin James (b. 1960, Cardiff) is a painter based in Glasgow, Scotland. He received his Honors BA at the Central School of Art, London, in 1982, and his MA in painting at the Royal College of Art, London, in 1986. James has also written extensively on art, and curated exhibitions, several at his own space 42 Carlton Place, in Glasgow. James has exhibited within the UK and internationally since the 1990s. Recent solo exhibitions have been at Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York (2020), Kerlin Gallery, Dublin (2021) and earlier this year at the Philadelphia Art Alliance. His work is included in the collections of the Tate, London, UK; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France; Dallas Museum of Art and San Antonio Museum of Art, Texas; Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing, China; National Museum of Wales, Cardiff; and OCT Boxes Museum, Shunde, China. The artist's first major monograph, published by Durer Editions, will be released this fall.