

Merlin James

Frame Paintings

9 June – 31 July 2010

Private View: Tuesday 8 June, 6–8 pm

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday 10am – 6pm

Mummery + Schnelle is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings by Merlin James.

James has always been concerned with the physical make-up of each painting – its surface, construction and material components, including the stretcher. Cutting, extending and piercing the canvas, painting around the sides and even onto the reverse and incorporating material such as hair, his pictures have been resistant to being framed. In a new development of his practice, James has now begun actively to engage with the problematics of 'picture framing', experimenting with tastes and styles, adapting traditional frame mouldings and materials. The works have integral picture frames that are not a final addition, but rather constructed and modified alongside, or even in advance of, the other elements of the painting. They are not, therefore, 'containing' in the sense that traditional frames are and nor do they necessarily denote that what we are looking at are conventional easel paintings. They do, however, raise questions of the definition or limits of the work, the world and the subject.

The new paintings also use semi-transparent 'supports' such as nylon, polyester and perspex, through which the stretcher and the wall behind it can be seen, allowing the viewer to make acquaintance with the whole structure. The stretchers are often unusually constructed, and incorporate small model buildings that have long been a kind of bi-product of James's studio work. The overall image seems formulated in a new vernacular that combines painted and physical elements and images. These works undermine the idea of the painting as image-on-support. Instead it is a constructed, reflexive entity in which image and material are simultaneous and interdependent.

James is known for a diverse and intermixed lexicon of imagery, partly generic, partly personal or esoteric. He depicts skies, seas and landscapes, sex, bridges and piers, birds, archaic figures, boats, building façades, interiors, heads and faces. These 'subjects' resist essentialist "meaning" in favour of subjective and shifting readings. Interestingly however, the transparent materials used in the new *Frame Paintings* foreground James's imagery, which floats free of painterly context, renewing questions of how it is to be read. Often metaphorical of relationships between making and looking, autonomy and relationship, and between the artist and the audience, James's images invite interpretation, yet make us aware we are collaborating in a meaning – a painted world – to which we give shape and resonance, and that does not exist without us.

With their evocation of genre, James's paintings have been read as a deconstruction of paintings past achievements. To the extent that there can be said to be an appeal to tradition in his work, it is in the form of a critical reflection on the history of art, not some conservative acquiescence in the face of it. James does not appropriate historical genres, but uses, reshapes and destabilizes them. Deconstruction for him is a dismantling of the tradition in terms of what has been unthought within it and what remains to be thought by it. It is, therefore, a positive, reactivated sense of the tradition, not a received experience of the past, and it permits a critical consciousness of the present.

Merlin James was born in Cardiff in 1960 and now lives and works in Glasgow. Images and full biographical and bibliographical information about him can be found on www.mummeryschnelle.com.

Merlin James was the recipient of a Scottish Arts Council grant in 2010.

Coinciding with Merlin James's exhibition, Mummery + Schnelle will present in the gallery's project room a selection of recent paintings on furnishing fabric and paper by **Louise Hopkins**.

For all further about both exhibitions please contact Andrew Mummery at andrew@mummeryschnelle.com or Wolfram Schnelle at wolfram@mummeryschnelle.com