

PRESS RELEASE

Christopher Stevens *Mass Observation*
Peter Harris *Art Dads*

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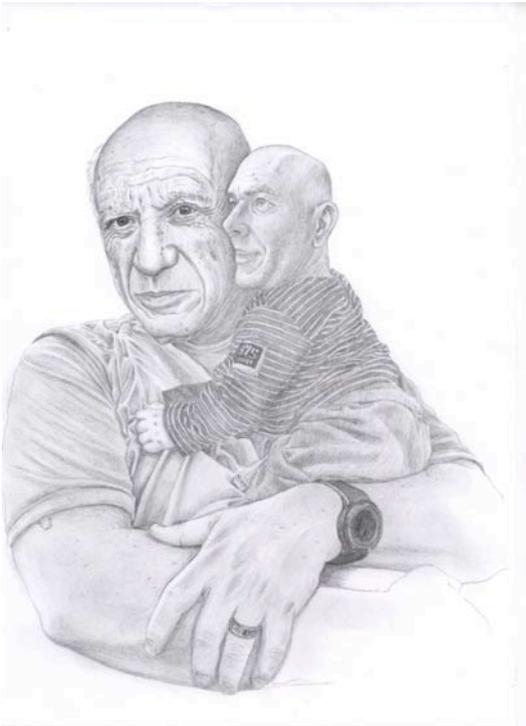


Christopher Stevens. *Gloria Mundi*. 2013. Oil on paper. 38 x 40 cm framed.

In his new exhibition *Mass Observation*, Christopher Stevens presents a new series of oil paintings on paper depicting groups of at least two, usually more people, either semi-clothed or naked, engaged in diverse sexual activities. They tend to focus on fore and after play (or some kind of alternative) rather than the main act.

Alongside these new paintings, Stevens will show other new paintings and photographs that have a closer relationship to older ongoing series he has made for some time. The subject matter for these works is very different, typically showing fragments or passing glimpses: a woman's hair, the sea, or a branch of cherry blossom at night. All share a sort of fleeting episodic quality, like glimpses from a train window or snatches of an overheard conversation. Language has been an important part in all Stevens' work for some time and the choice of medium is intended to modify or reinforce the subjects.

Relationships between objects and images are as important to Stevens as what can be said through a single work, hence the free juxtaposition of painting and photographs in this show. As Stevens says, "*all of my work, for as long as I can remember, and despite its different subject and rationales, has had, at its core my sense of bafflement at the things I don't understand. Making art is to me a way of making sense of the world. The apparent subject matter has shifted, but the concerns remain the same.*"



Peter Harris. *Picasso Dad*. 2013. Pencil on paper. 38 x 29 cm framed.

Peter Harris' new series of pencil drawings, *Art Dads*, explore with a disarming directness complex ideas of identity, origin, celebrity and self-portraiture. When asked why he turned various art and music icons into his father, Harris replied: "because they are my dads". Psychoanalyst James Herzog coined the expression 'father hunger' to refer to the son's longing for and need of contact with a father figure. Harris's father was a sailor, absent for most of his youth; and he died before Harris could really get to know him. Herzog has said that trauma causes a regression or reversal of the developmental process. This regression results in play that involves the prescribed participation of a symbolic equivalent of the father. One of Harris' *Art Dads*, Bob Dylan, has famously been linked to the father complex in his rejection of his paternal name. Like Harris, he sought out a series of father figures, or 'idols' as he called them, to act as his father confessors.

Since 1999, Harris has created an extensive series of paintings, photographs and short films he calls *Self Portraits by Proxy*. The common thread of this ongoing series is the use and appropriation of other people for the content and material that make up the works. French symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud declared: "I is another" – or in Harris' case, hundreds of others. He continues to search for his identity through engagement with those who have played a part in constructing it.

In *Self Portrait by Proxy 10: I Can't Stand It*, Harris sifted through hours of interview footage of camp entertainers and gay icons who entered his consciousness from the 1970s onwards. Any snippets of dialogue that resonated with him were edited together to represent facets of himself. Unforeseen possibilities of self-portraiture are thrown up by the juxtaposition of cut-up elements, a technique borrowed from the Dadaists and later expanded upon by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin. In this way, a self-portrait emerges from ready-made material.

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