

DAVID KIM WHITTAKER THE FEAR AND THE STABLE



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OPERA GALLERY





## PREFACE

Opera Gallery is delighted to present 'The Fear and the Stable' by David Kim Whittaker in what will be his first exhibition in New York City.

David Kim Whittaker is one of the most enthralling and intriguing artists of this generation, intuitively perpetuating and reshaping the tradition established by British Romantics including Francis Bacon, Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland. 'The Fear and the Stable' includes a new body of the artist's work made specifically for this exhibition.

These complex works juggle dual states of inner and outer calm and conflict, offering us a glimpse of strength and fragility, peace and discord, the conscious and subconscious, the masculine and the feminine through areas both delicate and intricate, alongside the more physical and often brutal gestural passages of paint. These ubiquitous states of conflict are arguably reinforced by Whittaker's gender dysphoria and the personal struggle with a condition that Whittaker has learned to live with through his endeavour of expressing something bigger than oneself through painting. The result is a universal human portrait of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one which emphasises the split utopian and dystopian nature of the times that we live in.

We wish to thank the artist wholeheartedly for this exhibition; an emphatic achievement which reinforces his rising status as a 'modern master'. We take great pleasure in sharing it with you.

*Gilles Dyan*  
Founder and President, Opera Gallery Group

*Amos Frajnd*  
Director, Opera Gallery New York







## INTRODUCTION

The fear and the stable. Where do we go to seek solace from the growing fears of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Are the walls that we look to build around our 'garden' for privacy or for protection? If we build them too high they might block out the light.

Our objectively focused culture seems ever increasingly obsessed with logical observation and response. Attempting to find simplistic and relatable conclusions to all the big and the little unknowns. Much of the world bays for the answers, a greedy grabbing at straws with the hope that we may be led somewhere better through that knowing, ignoring the fact that we may well be led somewhere worse. For a powerful flowing current of the many and the most, it seems that the mysteries of the universe are only ever justified when answers can be clearly pointed at and measurements taken. When things are proven. Proof – I've never really understood it. For me it never seems to prove much at all. The true nature of reality is and always has been utterly beyond my comprehension. There are few that take comfort in the unknowns of the universe, revelling in the many questions, knowing that the answers are somehow of less importance. It is in the mystery we bathe. My limited understanding of the true nature of the universe is that everything and anything is possible and that nothing is fixed. So truth, as far as it can be contemplated by our relatively small intelligence, is that the metaphysical abstract is more accurate than measured empirical knowledge. Metaphysics continues to ask 'why' where much of science halts. It doesn't even expect the answers. For me that is where truth hides, in the acceptance that 'all' cannot be pinned down and will, perhaps, always be beyond us. In the void questions and the faith that ensues, offer many far more

comfort than proof. Carl Jung wrote in 'The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious'; "If it be true that there can be no metaphysics transcending human reason, it is no less true that there can be no empirical knowledge that is not already caught and limited by the a priori structure of cognition."

Allegories of progress have been the lament of artists for many years, the Frankenstein tale of man(kind) messing with the bigger picture without fear of thought of consequence. Like a small child wanting to pick up the puppy, bones can be easily broken, with or without malice. There are some that watch in horror from the byline, shouting at us to learn some urgent humility, waiting for us to grow up and replace the clumsiness for grace.

David Kim Whittaker is the quintessential ontological artist whose whole life has been a dedicated examination into what it is to be a human being, whilst greeting the practical impossibility of the task. Instead the remaining (no small) task has been to catch the moth in the net for the briefest of moments, accepting that it must once again be set free. In an early introduction I once wrote for David Kim I included the following from Lewis Carroll's 1865 classic 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'; "Who are YOU?" said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I--I hardly know, sir, just at present-- at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then." The story of little Alice and her journey through Wonderland, posits the notion that we are what we dream we will become when open or susceptible. That identity is ambiguous, internal and ephemeral,

our own warren to explore, but where some of the tunnels remain blocked consciously or unconsciously. Perhaps, through art these tunnels can be accessed. Philosophically it is an interesting concept that everything we experience can inform and indeed change who we are, and result in an ever-expanding maze of the self. Like Lorenz's 'Butterfly Effect' which proposed that one flap of a butterfly's wings can change the weather forever – any matter of stimulus can alter and inform who we are to become. We are all in a constant state of flux or metamorphosis. Heraclitus argued that change was ubiquitous; "You cannot step into the same river twice". So I can't tell you who I am, or who David Kim Whittaker is, or expect you to be able to offer me the same service. It all moves very fast indeed.

On the table in his studio is a clipping of a photograph of Alice Liddell at age 9 (The real person who inspired Carroll's book). I ask David Kim why the picture sits there, modestly enshrined. He explains: "there she is at the start of her life, innocent and clearly full of imagination and possibility, alive and looking back at you, but now she's gone and the rest becomes a history almost lost - like a trail of vapour, but her whispers echo". Life and its transience is what David Kim grabs hold of; the paintings are a rabbit hole, which can always be escaped into.

Metamorphosis remains a theme within the work, but also Whittaker's life (the two are inextricably linked). Over the past 10 years Whittaker has been in a state of physical and psychological development since an official diagnosis of gender dysphoria. Outside of his vocation as an artist, in the day-to-day, David Kim lives as

'Kim', a woman. Within the artworld David Kim is accepting and embracing of this 'trans' state. It is what it is, nonbinary, neither or both, and explicitly provides an invaluable universal overarching context to the work. I emphasise universal, it is important to do so, as these paintings are for, and of, all of us. Whittaker's complexity, integrity and fearlessness offer a distinctive and original voice. As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None'; "One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star".

These paintings, primarily of the head, illustrate a generic duality confined within the human condition, both the physical and the emotional manifested. Primal, archetypal male attributes transcend into a feminine space. This fusion informs us and allows us to contemplate the achievement and development of our species. Whittaker describes his studio trials as an endless artistic search for something as yet unseen where the works are born from moments of intense creativity where they are pushed as far as possible. He finds the window to capture the image 'relatively short before it disappears into itself.' Moments of darkness and joy, from the cradle to the grave. The weeping, the brave face. The unpredictable nature of being. The complexities of gender. Thought and emotions, personal and universal – this is what David Kim Whittaker describes as 'the rapture of life'.

The studio walls have recently been cleared of a plethora of iconic imagery, which fed the artist's mind and soul and acted as stimulus, creating an inner sanctum echoing the mind's eye, this clearing emphasises Whittaker's growing trust to draw from within but also to cleanse.







There is, however, always a sense of the world outside, as his studio hovers in a former industrial office space over the streets of Newquay, a typical weathered seaside town in the far west of England. There is a sense of an embracing of this literal 'inner' and 'outer' duality in the mark making, a celebration that perhaps the self-expressions that we see on the streets; the tattoos on flesh and vestiges from spray cans and marker pens run parallel to the marks made by alternative civilisations on indigenous tribal skin, in rococo sgraffito and scratched on to primeval cave walls. That we are merely another tribe paying homage to our past and our future and recording our lives with our individual markings, and all these markings express our uniquely human, universal, story. As Georg Hegel once said it "World history is the record of the mind's effort to understand itself".

Existence is where the inner and the outer worlds collide. Where the messy web of all that envelopes us, smothering and comforting, tearing and stroking, takes place. The self is the canvas placed at the centre of this universal battle. Whittaker represents this with fine, intricate, representational painting alongside erratic, gestural, impasto, seemingly violent mark making. These differing techniques denote a conflict but also reflect a place where harmonic fusion exists. We get to feel the blurring celebratory and melancholic power of memory, the moments that aid transcendence and at the same time hint at our primal element. The ghostly images of places once visited or perhaps seen third hand at the turn of a page. Scraps of paper torn from tales once read, a story that may have moved or merely caught peripheral attention, all build the temporal and spiritual structure. These fragmented human

heads become two-way mirrors – a life's moment mutates and becomes a small reflection on the whole of humanity.

Whittaker's work marks a very personal journey, one that speaks of the universal, but led by the artist's firsthand and vicarious experience of the world around and within him. However 'The Fear and the Stable' emphasises a growing fear of where we are all going and a growing, survival led, urgency for inner and outer peace. Individual stories about the mundane and the weighty, triviality and daydream collide with loss and suffering. Fragility and thoughts of escape. The paintings are heavy and sometimes tragic, whilst still remaining comfortingly prosaic. Through this sharing we are propositioned to contemplate that we may be isolated but we are not alone in being so.

David Kim Whittaker's ambition is to make something monumental about the human condition that has not been seen before. To make paintings that lay down a marker or send out an echo of this life, reflecting some of the messiness of existence alongside inner utopian desire and potential. I've seen, up close, that making work has helped Whittaker to come to terms with his own complex existence. An essence has been captured, it will forever remain a window for others to peer through and in the reflection of these tableaus, perhaps you will catch a glimpse of yourself through this sharing. The artist has dropped the shield of privacy and protection, allowing for us to momentarily remove those walls around ourselves. The nature of the Romantic is to yearn for what seems out of reach, even more so in the growing storm of change.

*Joseph Clarke, 2017/18*





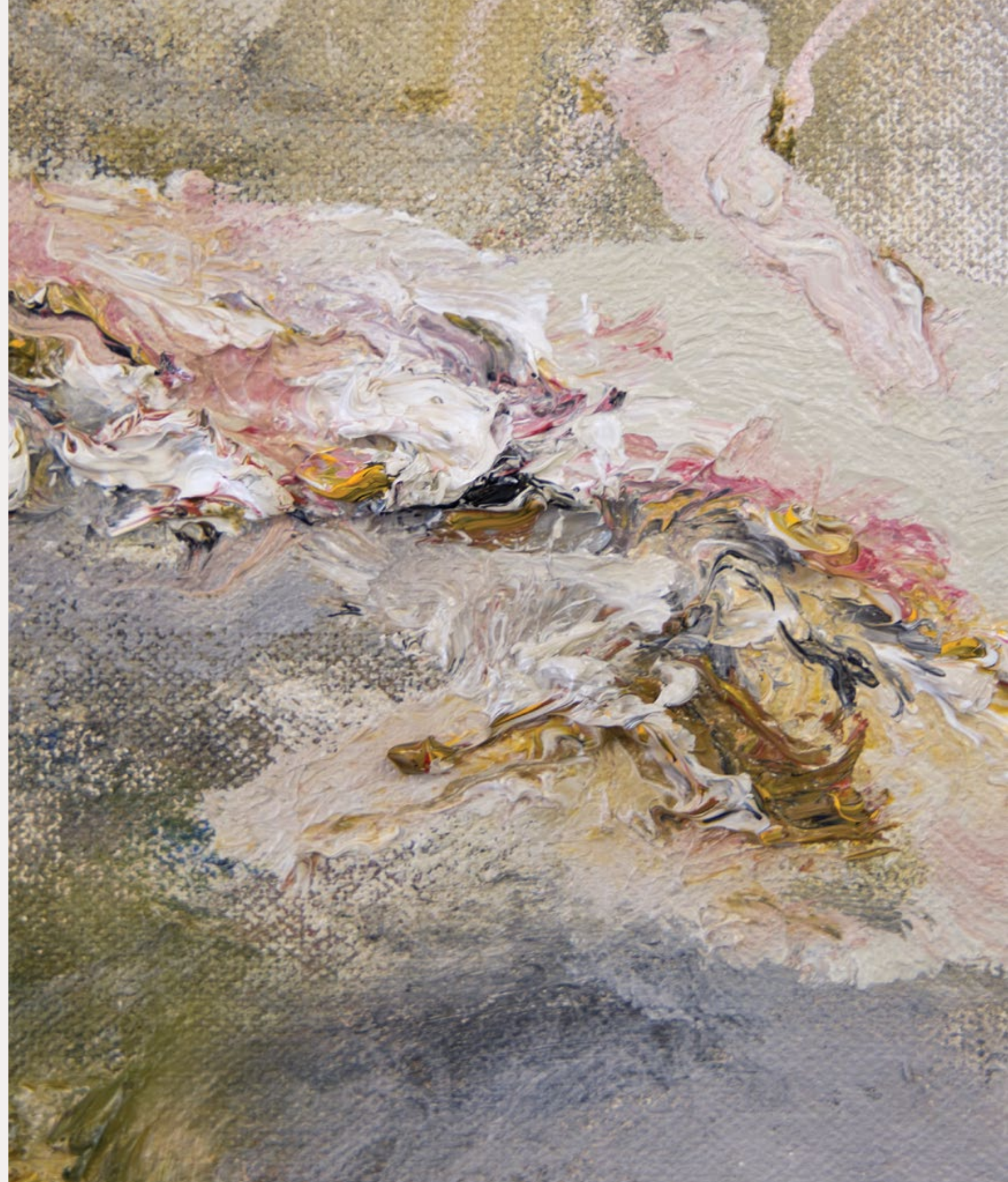
## THE FEAR AND THE STABLE

The room is a stable, to wake into sunlight, from the fears of the night. Closing mouth, dry like a Summer's air. Our world, what we are, the fear passing back to the boarded up dreams. Today Heaven is full so I must go out in to the street and shake the day, and pay my way, before the night returns and the fear. For I am here, under the straw again.

I fear for the ships now. The hurricane draws near. Wrapped in my bed but cannot sleep. A dam of unforgiving dreams seep from the shadows of the world undue. The fear of cancer, acid addicted trigger figures, throwing their cards in to the well. Children of the pixelated generation, armed with an iPhone. Phantoms writhing in the dirt charged air of simulated worlds. Crowded skies, torn limbs scatter the freeways, faster cars, microphone bras. You laugh now, laugh loud, but he doesn't listen anymore. His sheds are long gone. We are what we made ourselves. An image reflected in all our cleverness. A stigma in the shadowed stables of mankind.

Let me go to sleep. Let me go back to the biblical yards. Let me ride the ghost train once more. Let me hold my mothers hand again. Let me free from the daunting pain. Let me disappear in to the dark nights rain.

*David Kim Whittaker, 2018*





AN ENGLISH WORK (ORPHEUS LOOKS BACK)  
2018 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 72.8 x 72.8 in | 185 x 185 cm







AN ENGLISH WORK (EURYDICE)

2018 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 72.8 x 72.8 in | 185 x 185 cm





QUAI BRANLY HEAD I

2018 . oil, acrylic, collage, pencil on primed wood panel . 22 x 22 in | 56 x 56 cm



QUAI BRANLY HEAD II (FEASTING)

2018 . oil, acrylic, collage, pencil on primed wood panel . 22 x 22 in | 56 x 56 cm





QUAI BRANLY HEAD III (JUG HEAD)

2018 . oil, acrylic, collage, pencil on primed wood panel . 22 x 22 in | 56 x 56 cm



QUAI BRANLY HEAD IV (VINTAGE GIRL)

2018 . oil, acrylic, collage, pencil on primed wood panel . 22 x 22 in | 56 x 56 cm





QUAI BRANLY HEAD V

2018 . oil, acrylic, collage, pencil on primed wood panel . 22 x 22 in | 56 x 56 cm



QUAI BRANLY HEAD VI (BROOCH FOR MOUTH)

2018 . oil, acrylic, collage, pencil on primed wood panel . 22 x 22 in | 56 x 56 cm



THE NONBINARY I

2018 . oil and acrylic on primed wood panel . 36.2 x 36.2 in | 92 x 92 cm







THE NONBINARY II (THE OOLALA)

2018 . oil and acrylic on primed wood panel . 36.2 x 36.2 in | 92 x 92 cm



THE NONBINARY III (METHODS OF APPLICATION)  
2018 . oil and acrylic on primed wood panel . 36.2 x 36.2 in | 92 x 92 cm







HORSE BECOMING FIGURE

2018 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 48 x 48 in | 122 x 122 cm



GORILLA (MY LAST DAY, EVENTS MAY 2016, CINCINNATI)

2018 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 48 x 48 in | 122 x 122 cm





HEADHUNTER

2018 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 48 x 48 in | 122 x 122 cm



SAVAGE UNION (DO NOT REMOVE THE HUMAN ELEMENT FROM THE EQUATION)

2017 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 48 x 48 in | 122 x 122 cm





SAVAGE UNION

2017 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 48 x 48 in | 122 x 122 cm





SEEING THE MAASAI (I - VI)

2017 . acrylic and collage on paper . 11.8 x 8.3 in | 30 x 21 cm each



THE MARY GODWIN TRIPTYCH  
(PHANTASM OF A MAN / CHRISTABEL / WAKING DREAM)

2018 . oil, acrylic, collage on primed wood panel . triptych (each panel): 36.2 x 26.2 in | 92 x 66 cm





BEFORE THE BULLFIGHT (DANIEL GARCIA NAVARRETE) I & II

2017 . oil, acrylic, collage, pencil on board . 12 x 12 in | 30 x 30 cm each

## THE BULLFIGHT

A piercing thunder. The pissing in the dusty yellow dirt. Thunderous, monstrous, black midnight kicking. Blood fired lungs. Engines winding down. Clowned follies taunt beauties arrowed. The charge in again. Red flagged moons rapture in pain. Its last try to go dignified. Like machine guns fired, velvet blacks turn red, as Monet lily pools well in the beast's eyes. In grandeur of golds pearls of white, he twists with spear. Some turn away, some sustain, like flies on a Dalí, waiting for the tourniquet to break open, like a waterfall of blood for the gods to bathe. This legend or delusion dances delirium, catching him in the chest. Armoured horse positions like a chess piece. Mother they'll never take me alive. Share my prayers now for the moment is here. My heart burns as I swallow the blood, for the love I never had.

*David Kim Whittaker, 2018*



THE TRINITIES FOR VOYAGER TWO  
(ARE WE LETTING THE WORLD SLIP THROUGH OUR HANDS)

2018 . oil and acrylic on canvas . 48 x 48 in | 122 x 122 cm







## BIOGRAPHY

b. 1964

David Kim Whittaker was born and lives in Cornwall, England

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018 *The Fear and the Stable*, Opera Gallery, New York  
 2017 *The Flesh To The Frame:*  
 Part 1: *In The Existence*, Opera Gallery, London  
 Part 2: *The Primal Vortex of Us*, Opera Gallery, Paris  
*A Portrait for Human Presence*, Fondazione Mudima, Milan  
 2015 *Portrait for Human Presence*, Anima-Mundi, St Ives  
 2014 *Nature of the Life Pavilions*, Millennium, St Ives  
 2012 *A Bird In The Mammal House*, Millennium, St Ives  
 2011 *A Beautiful Kind of Certainty*, Millennium, St Ives  
 2009 *Brief Moment In The Exposure*, Millennium, St Ives  
 2008 *If This Life*, Goldfish, Penzance  
 2001 Gallery Excalibur, St Ives  
 2000 Falmouth Art Gallery, Cornwall  
 1992 Hyde Park Gallery, London

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018 *The Monaco Masters Show*, Opera Gallery, Monaco  
*Art Central*, Hong Kong  
 2017 *Portrait*, Opera Gallery, New York  
*The Monaco Masters Show*, Opera Gallery, Monaco  
*Mixed Winter*, Anima-Mundi, St Ives  
*Art Miami*, Miami  
 2016 *Britartnia*, Opera Gallery, London  
*From Silence*, Herrick Gallery, London  
 2015 *Mixed*, Anima-Mundi, St Ives  
*ART15*, London  
 2014 *Suspended Sentences*, Turners Warehouse, Newlyn  
*I*, Truro Festival, Truro  
*ART14*, London  
*Mixed*, Millennium, St Ives  
 2013 *Artists Make Faces*, City Art Gallery, Plymouth  
 (Curated by Monica Kinley OBE)  
*The Lock Up 3*, The Ivy, London

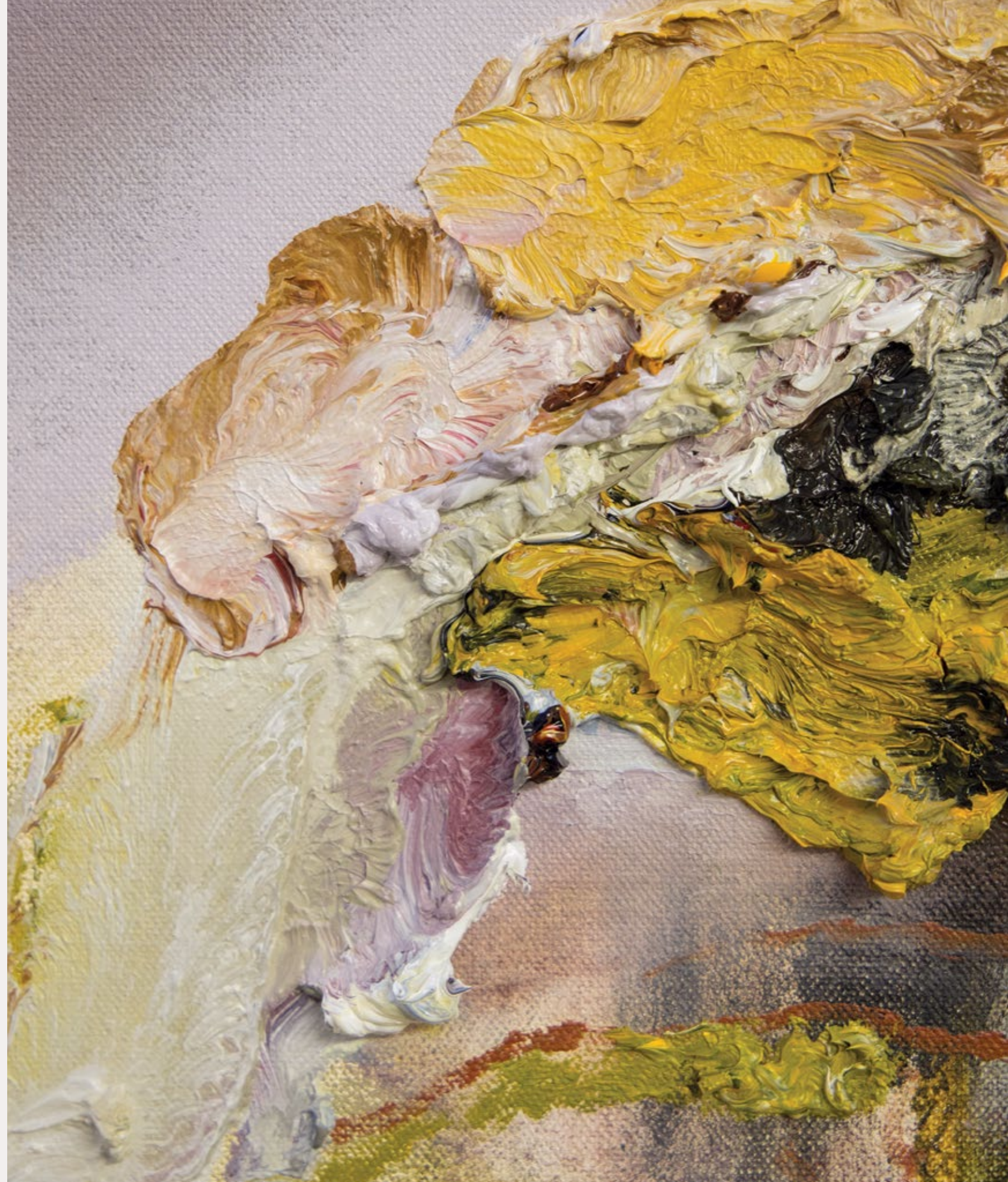
2012 *Mixed*, Millennium, St Ives  
 2011 *NOAC* (First Prize Winner), Pallant House, Chichester  
*The Discerning Eye* (invited), Mall Galleries, London  
*Mixed*, Millennium, St Ives  
*The Lock Up 2*, Red Bull Studios, London  
*Unchartered Landscape*, NSA at St Ives Society, St Ives  
 2010 *The House of Fairy Tales*, Millennium, St Ives  
 2009 *The Lock Up*, Eastcastle House, London  
*Mixed*, Millennium & Goldfish, Cornwall  
*NSA at Royal West of England Academy*, Bristol  
 2008 *Mixed / No Theme*, Goldfish, Penzance  
 2007 *Move*, Goldfish at Vyner Street, London  
 2005 *Summer Exhibition*, RA, Piccadilly, London  
 2004 *The Discerning Eye*, Mall Galleries, London  
 2003 *Debut*, Gallery One O Two, London  
*St. Ives Festival Show*, The Mariners Gallery, St Ives  
 2002 *Show for Reuters*, Britart, Brick Lane, London  
 2000 *One Foot Two Show*, Mafuji Gallery, London  
 1999 *Raw Art*, London  
 1998 *Mixed*, Highgate Fine Art, London  
 1994 *Mixed*, Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach  
 1993 *Mixed*, Salthouse Gallery, St Ives

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

2018 *The Fear and the Stable* (Opera Gallery)  
 2017 *The Flesh to The Frame* (Opera Gallery)  
*A Portrait for Human Presence* (Fondazione Mudima)  
 2014 *Nature of the Life Pavilions* (Millennium)  
 2012 *Bird In The Mammal House* (Millennium)  
 2011 *A Beautiful Kind of Certainty* (Millennium)  
 2009 *Brief Moment In The Exposure* (Millennium)  
 2008 *If This Life* (Goldfish)  
 2007 *Move* (Goldfish)  
 2006 *Dictionary of Artists in Britain since 1945*, David Buckman

### PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Falmouth Art Gallery, Cornwall  
 Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery





Published by Opera Gallery to celebrate *David Kim Whittaker 'The Fear and the Stable'* at Opera Gallery New York

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