



MERLIN JAMES

*1960

Merlin James self-consciously engages the genre conventions of Western painting. Employing a range of subject matter and gestural technique, he evokes core concerns of the discipline such as the role of narrative, emotive use of color, and pictorial space. His technique ranges from the classic application of acrylic on canvas, to painting on transparencies and distressing the painterly surface itself. Often, the small-scale canvases appear dense with heavily applied paint and visceral material such as hair and sand. While James' canvases overtly partake in Western painterly traditions, they display an acute consciousness of postmodern disjunctures between history and depiction.

Beyond the complex engagement with art-historical references, James adamantly identifies as a painter of pictures. Viewed individually, these often focus on a single object, surrounded by some environmental detail: a sheep in front of a feeding trough, a house by the sea. The motifs are familiar, yet remain intangible. What is accurately listed in the titles of the paintings is executed in a faux-naive manner. The paintings appear like a distant memory that can be named, yet lack a precise shape. Vaguely or completely un-dated canvases add to the free-floating nature of the pictorial subject. It may be this paradoxical combination of deadpan subject matter and elusive rendering that accounts for the sometimes fragmentary character of the work, appearing almost as an extract of the unconscious.

*Merlin James (*1960) lives and works in Glasgow. Past solo exhibitions have included presentations at Kunstverein Freiburg, Parasol Unit, London, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, the National Gallery, Wales (1995), and Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. James is a widely recognised expert on painting, writing and lecturing extensively on the topic. In 2007 he represented Wales at the 52nd Venice Biennale, and he received the Scottish Arts Council Visual Artists' Award in 2010.*