

Blair Whiteford

A Head That Utters to the Foot of a God

633 N La Brea Ave

Opening Saturday, May 28, 2022

Matthew Brown is pleased to present *A Head That Utters to the Foot of a God*, a solo exhibition of recent paintings by Blair Whiteford. In the nearly twenty paintings on view, Whiteford probes art history and science fiction to envision new subjectivities and horizons of human understanding.

A classically trained painter, Whiteford has a strong sense of art history and adeptly deploys its various tropes and iconographies. Particularly interested in European Renaissance painting and the New York School of abstract expressionists, he shifts between painterly techniques to produce mystical compositions that appear both ancient and alien.

Funneling centuries of art history through the prism of his brush, Whiteford transforms the surface of the canvas into a transcendental field where different temporalities can commingle. This temporal deterritorialization, or collapse of past, present, and future, produces a mysterious effect: Whiteford's sceneries and figures feel at once historical, hypothetical, and celestial, existing outside of time all together. Freed from the constraints of a fixed context, more humanistic concerns rise to the fore.

Although steeped in the traditions of religious painting, for Whiteford, painting is ultimately a humanistic enterprise: an endeavor to come to know ourselves and our environments, mediated by images. Understood in this way, religion functions in painting as a shorthand to address singularly human questions about life, death, love, and ethics, and contending with the divine means contending with ourselves: our bodies, our minds, our motivations and fears, our culture, and our environments.

If traditional religious painting embarked on a quest for the divine, Whiteford's paintings speculate as to its meaning. Where does divinity reside? What does it mean to be human? And what would it mean to become "more human" while living in a world of machines?

Twilight Escaping the Crest of an Era (2022) begs these questions within an undulating field of primordial soup. Two figures hover and drift, barely distinguishable from their swirling environment. Just as Renaissance artists would suspend gravity to convey divinity, Whiteford permits his subjects to float freely in defiance of the laws of physics.

Yet even as his subjects seem untethered to the ground, and in turn, any mortal realm, a strange tension permeates the surface of Whiteford's canvases. A combination of oil, acrylic, and watercolor paints, Whiteford's marks could as soon be taken for viscous eddies of plutonic magma pooling on a prehistoric earth as for sweeping currents of atmospheric circulation on a far-away planet.

Whiteford's works do not only adopt the formal properties or aesthetics of science fiction, but also its central tenet: that imagining an alternative reality can paradoxically allow us to better examine and ultimately understand our own. Plunging into the uncertain waters of fiction and speculation, then, means venturing towards the most deep, subterranean, and unknowable aspects of ourselves and our own existence. In turn, painting becomes a gesture through which we seek to know the unknowable, or, rather, a head that utters to the foot of a god.

633 N La Brea Ave

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MATTHEW BROWN

Blair Whiteford (b. 1990, New York) lives and works in New York. He received his MFA from Yale University in 2019 and BFA from Ringling College of Art and Design in 2013.

Solo and two-person exhibitions include *Sowing a Seed in a Field Made of Ash*, Jack Barrett, New York (2021); *Flesh Beloved*, Slipping Window, Union Pacific, London (2019); *Hoodwinked*, with Rory Rosenberg, Gern NY, New York (2017); *Leisure*, with Blake Daniels, FRESH Exhibitions, Savannah, GA (2014); and *The Nighttime Monument*, SO WHAT SPACE, New York (2013).

Recent group exhibitions include *Complete Metamorphosis*, Super Duchess Gallery, New York (2019); *Fratirnete 188*, Dwight st., New Haven, CT (2019); *Again Always*, Yale University, New Haven, CT (2019); *You Can Get in and Not do Anything*, Yale University, New Haven, CT (2018); *Keeper of a Fever*, No Place Gallery, Columbus, OH (2018); *Group Show 1*, Page Gallery, New York (2016); *Flux Hustle*, *No Holds Barred*, New York (2015); *What We Saw Made Present*, Crossley Gallery, Sarasota, FL (2013).