

MERLIN JAMES

HOBBY HORSE

02.21–04.05.25

Sikkema Malloy Jenkins is pleased to announce *Hobby Horse*, a solo show of paintings by Merlin James, on view from February 21 through April 5, 2025. A public opening reception for the exhibition will be held at the gallery on Friday, February 21, from 6–8pm.

The exhibition title refers to a motif seen in several works, of a small child in a cowboy outfit, riding a hobby horse. Imagery in James's work, while sometimes suggestive of personal associations or memories, often relates metaphorically to the nature of painting itself. In the classic 1951 essay 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse,' E. H. Gombrich examines the way a child's hobby horse "represents" or otherwise corresponds to a real horse, and uses the discussion to illuminate how illusion, abstraction, expression, meaning, and value all function in works of art. James explores similar concerns, and his hobby horse rider perhaps stands, in more ways than one, for the artist.

Another element appearing in several works throughout show is an elongated, centralized, vertical ovoid or mandorla shape, that has recurred in James's paintings over many years. The artist describes the form as being neither abstract nor representational, and not symbolic, yet having for him an inexplicable reality and resonance.

Further features add to the complexity of James's project: non-rectilinear formats with curved sides; unusual, artist-made picture frames; transparent gauzes

that reveal the structure of the stretcher bars behind. In general, James does not distinguish between support and image.

James's exhibitions often place new paintings alongside ones from past years, and the present show includes works dating from as far back as the early 1980s. While his art periodically introduces innovations, he considers all his work current and views the development of his oeuvre as cumulative and recursive rather than linear—a quality that parallels the condition of memory.

Certain recent paintings depict the Arnold Circus bandstand in East London, a location James first painted and drew around 1983 when he had a studio nearby. The bandstand's polygonal structure, and enclosure by fences and flights of steps, evokes some of James's other motifs such as piers, toll booths, bridges, and entranceways. These works again speak to an interest in the nature of artifice but also suggest more personal references or memories. In some paintings, figures approach each other or the viewer, while other scenes are marked by a palpable absence of any figures at all.

Hobby Horse overall reflects James's characteristic diversity of subject: land, sky, and seascape; still life objects; nocturnal darkness and dazzling sunlight; glimpses through windows; apparent abstraction; explicit sex; intersecting rivers and roads; likenesses of individuals; and far horizons.

SIKKEMA
MALLOY
JENKINS

530 West 22nd Street
New York NY 10011

gallery@smjny.com
212-929-2262

Merlin James (b. 1960, Cardiff, Wales) lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland. Selected solo exhibitions include presentations at Maureen Paley & Studio M, London, UK (2024); Kunstsaele, Berlin, Germany (2023); Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY (2022); Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, PA (2022); Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, Ireland (2021); and A-M-G5, Glasgow, Scotland (2018). James has also written extensively on art, and curates his own exhibition space at 42 Carlton Place, Glasgow.

His work can be found in the collections of global institutions including the British Council, UK; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville, Paris, France; National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, UK; OCT Boxes Art Museum, Shunde, China; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Tate Britain, London, UK; and Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing, China, among others. A landmark artist monograph, compiling over forty years of James's painting practice, was co-published by Sikkema Malloy Jenkins in 2023.

For any press inquiries, please contact Laura Weinthal at (212) 929-2262 or laura@sikkemajenkinsco.com.

SIKKEMA
MALLOY
JENKINS

530 West 22nd Street
New York NY 10011

gallery@smjny.com
212-929-2262