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BILLY CHILDISH MAN IN THE MOUTH OF A CAVE

By Mark Westall • 24 May 2019

Carl Freedman Gallery opens in Margate, Kent on Saturday 25th May with a major solo show of new work by British painter Billy Childish. After purchasing part of the old Thanet Press building in the centre of town, Carl Freedman's new HQ spans 10,000 square foot of a concrete 1960s commercial building. The site includes three exhibition spaces, an artist apartment and an upper floor dedicated to Freedman's print publishing business Counter Editions.



Billy Childish swimmer, 2018 Oil and charcoal on linen 183 x 244 cm courtesy of Carl Freedman Gallery

'This is a fantastic opportunity for us to present larger-scale solo presentations by our artists as well as more expansive curated shows. Margate is going through an amazing transformation, led by a growing art community, and we are excited to be a part of the future of the town's creative-led regeneration'

– Carl Freedman.

The inaugural exhibition man in the mouth of a cave by Billy Childish introduces new themes in the artist's oeuvre of swimming and wild uninhibited nature. Free of irony or superficial novelty, these paintings espouse values of authenticity, spirituality, and beauty, conveying a sense of a vivid physical presence. Above all, they express Childish's earnest engagement with life.



Billy Childish wading out, 2017 Oil and charcoal on linen 244 x 152.5 cm courtesy of Carl Freedman Gallery

Waterfalls, the sea, caves, trees, nudes and the artist himself are recurring motifs. In some works the mouths of caves suggest the religious motif of the empty tomb, in others a dark, Styx-like river. Present throughout is a quality of quiet melancholy combined with a vibrating, somewhat hallucinatory energy, rendered through Childish's roiling brushwork.

Childish's canvases clearly bear the marks of the art-historical lineage of which Childish feels himself a part. Interlocking patterns and forms cluster, coalesce, and dissipate, working as vehicles for Childish's Munch-like preoccupation with colour. Staccato brushstrokes are contained by more flowing, sinuous lines, recalling the visionary intensity of German Expressionism. Embedded in a tradition stretching back into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Childish's work is still – as ever – insistently and idiosyncratically his own. As Childish states: 'You could say that these paintings are ultra- postmodernist; they've absorbed everything, and then decided what's of value. Each one is an exultation of being a painting.'

Unconcerned with any narrative of progress within his practice each painting – whether a depiction of his nude body or a birch tree – is, for Childish, a form of self-portraiture.

In his own words:

'As I work fluidly from painting to painting, theme to theme, so the cycles develop organically and explain themselves without my prescription. In essence I am painting one painting that is ever- changing as if of its own volition – the painting of myself.'

