

Chris Ofili: *Harvest*

Exhibition 25 June–10 September 2022

Victoria Miro Venice, Il Capricorno, San Marco 1994, 30124 Venice, Italy



Chris Ofili, *Harvest – Flower Eaters*, 2021
Watercolour, charcoal and gold leaf on paper
Left: 11.6 x 11 cm
Right: 11.8 x 11.5 cm
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Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Victoria Miro is delighted to present *Harvest*, an exhibition in Venice by Chris Ofili.

The exhibition debuts a suite of new works that share the title *Harvest – Flower Eaters*. Completed over the past year in watercolour, charcoal and gold leaf on paper, these works comprise two rectangular forms that read as windows on to a nocturnal world. They contain, on the left-hand side, a female head, and on the right, a male head. Facing one another, bowed and with their eyes closed, each of these holds in their mouth the stem of a flower that bursts into kaleidoscopic colour, while showers of gold dots take on a constellatory appearance against the surrounding darkness.

Though they share a state of reverie, they are quite separate from one another compositionally. Perhaps they refer to the lotus-eaters encountered by Odysseus in Greek mythology who, succumbing to the narcotic effect of the lotus fruit and flowers, entered a blissful, amnesic slumber, later recalled in Tennyson’s poem *The Lotos-Eaters* with its lines: ‘Music that gentler on the spirit lies, Than tir’d eyelids upon tir’d eyes; Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.’

While Ofili’s *Flower Eaters* do not represent a specific story, they are indicative of the artist’s continued interest in the kinds of narrative found in classical mythology, and in the other-worldly or super-human forces or energies that seem to prefigure moments of transformation. They tap into different

levels of consciousness, the distinct emotional registers of night and day, and the mystery and folklore of Trinidad, where the artist has lived since 2005.

The *Flower Eaters* and two larger works on view, titled *Harvester*, 2021, which depict a figure flying through a night sky above a flower meadow, share themes that have occupied Ofili for several years. For instance, an earlier painting by the artist, titled *The Healer*, 2008, features the yellow poui tree, notable for its intense, short-lived blossoming, and a character, *The Healer*, whose frenzied feasting causes the flowers to cascade through the night sky to the ground.

As with this earlier painting, the works in *Harvest* connect with the artist's ongoing consideration of the luminous, numinous and, perhaps ultimately, ineffable, and his career-long interest in transcendence through visual means.

About the artist

Chris Ofili was born in Manchester, England, in 1968, and currently lives and works in Trinidad. He received his BA in Fine Art from the Chelsea School of Art in 1991 and his MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art in 1993. Major solo exhibitions of the artist's work have been presented at international venues including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (2017–2019); National Gallery, London (2017); New Museum, New York (2014), travelling to Aspen Art Museum (2015); The Arts Club of Chicago (2010); Tate Britain, London (2010 and 2005); Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (2006), The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2005) and Serpentine Gallery, London (1998). The artist represented Britain in the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 and won the Turner Prize in 1998.

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