

BILLY CHILDISH
where the black water slid

June 22–September 3, 2022
London



Billy Childish, *trees, morning, 2022* (detail). Oil and charcoal on linen, 72.05 x 60.04 inches (183 x 152.5 cm)

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Lehmann Maupin is pleased to announce *where the black water slid*, an exhibition of new work by **Billy Childish**. A true Renaissance man, the British artist is at once painter, printmaker, musician, photographer, and writer. In addition to his paintings, works on paper, and multiples, Childish has produced hundreds of albums of music and numerous volumes of fiction and poetry. As a painter, Childish works quickly and intuitively, often creating his kinetic compositions in a single session without any revision. Working primarily on linen, his canvases exude a warm glow, and his palette is often natural and earthy, reflecting the tenor of the traditional art historical subjects—seascapes, figure in the landscape, still lifes—he engages. His subjects are frequently people he knows or admires or drawn from his environment: birch forests, bathers, self-portraits, or his wife as a reclining female nude are recurring themes. As part of the exhibition, Lehmann Maupin will host Childish for a day of painting open to the public on Wednesday, June 29, from 1:00 pm in Gallery 1 at 1 Cromwell Place, where visitors can interact with Childish and witness his creative process unfold.

For *where the black water slid*, Childish explores the classic theme of the bather, with many works featuring swimmers immersed in swirling waters or figures wading in pools and caves fed by rushing waterfalls. Rendered in deep hues of green and brown offset with bright white accents, these works portray idyllic scenes of leisure and relaxation, and suggest deep communion with both nature and self. Other paintings depict bathers fully immersed in bright, glistening water, with colorful refractions reflected across the picture plane, showcasing Childish's dynamic treatment of water and light. *where the black water slid* also includes work from Childish's recent skull series, set in natural landscapes. Recalling the tradition of vanitas painting, these memento mori poetically remind viewers to cherish that which is most important in life—family, friends, and time spent in the natural world.

While his painting style and surrealist landscapes are often compared to those of fin de siècle expressionist painters such as Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch, it is the ethos these artists represent—their spiritual and creative integrity—that is most compelling for Childish. A total artist, Childish has long embodied these qualities in his trenchant anti-establishment, anti-authority stance and his reverence for traditional, representational oil painting regardless of its status within contemporary artistic discourse. An unabashed universalist, Childish considers artistry to be the inheritance of every human being, a method to capture the expressive impulse and visualize the powerful lure of beauty and its innate connection to the divine.



Billy Childish in his studio, 2022.

Billy Childish (b. 1959, Chatham, Kent, United Kingdom; lives and works in Whitstable, Kent) is known for his introspective, autobiographical, and deeply emotional paintings, writing, and music. After leaving secondary school at age 16, Childish worked at the Naval Dockyard in Chatham as an apprentice stonemason. Initially denied an interview to the local art school, he produced hundreds of drawings that gained him entry to London's Saint Martin's School of Art. Childish's defiance of authority led to his eventual expulsion from art school in 1981. Since then, Childish has gained something of a cult status worldwide, writing and publishing five novels and more than 40 volumes of confessional poetry, recording more than 150 LPs, and painting several hundred works. Through all of these disciplines, Childish addresses social, political, and personal issues such as war, protest, his turbulent childhood, and his struggles with addiction. While his confessional poetry and music explore these issues with startling honesty, Childish's paintings are more subtle. His subjects are often drawn from his environment or are people he knows or admires: birch forests, self-portraits, a lone figure in a pastoral English landscape, and his wife as a reclining female nude. Childish works quickly and intuitively, making spare marks on raw canvas that leave much of it visible. He identifies with artists who worked outside a group or movement, intrigued by their outsider roles in society, such as Vincent van Gogh, Kurt Schwitters, and Edvard Munch. Labeling himself a "radical traditionalist," Childish has a reverence for traditional oil painting yet has resolutely resisted any connection with a particular group or artistic movement.

Childish attended Medway College of Design, Kent in 1977 and Saint Martin's School of Art, London in 1978. Solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at Lehmann Maupin in New York (2020) and Seoul (2020); Neugerriemschneider, Berlin, Germany (2018); Villa Schöningen, Berlin, Germany (2017); Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, TX (2017); Rochester Art Gallery, Kent, United Kingdom (2016); Opelvillen Rüsselsheim, Frankfurt, Germany (2016); White Columns, New York (2010); and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2010). Select group exhibitions featuring his work include *BILLY CHILDISH, HARRY ADAMS and EDGEWORTH JOHNSTONE: Our Friend Larionov*, Pushkin House, London (2014); *Paintings Sweet Paintings*, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aache, Germany (2014); and *British Art Show 5*, City Art Centre, Edinburgh (2000).



Billy Childish, 2020. Photo by Rikard Osterlund

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since Inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity, and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has locations in New York, Hong Kong, Seoul and London, as well as a team in mainland China. In the past year with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.



Lehmann Maupin London at Cromwell Place. Photo by Alex Delfanne