

Monster Chetwynd *The Cat's Whiskers*

8 Bury Street SW1Y
08 December 2022 – 12 January 2023

This December, Monster Chetwynd presents *The Cat's Whiskers*, a group of four hand blown glass sculptures, shown alongside a series of recent watercolours, at the Bury Street gallery in St James's. The result of an ambitious project, the sculptures were made in collaboration with highly skilled makers at the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, as part of a major project called Glass Exchange and unveiled earlier this year at Durham Cathedral's Galilee Chapel.

Made in 2022, each of the four glass dioramas draw inspiration from the local history and setting of Durham Cathedral, reimagining episodes from the lives of two legendary Northumbrian saints whose tombs are located at the Galilee Chapel. The works depict stories from the life of Venerable Bede and St. Cuthbert, as described in Bede's writings. Composed in luminous, brightly coloured glasses, the works dramatically reenvision the miraculous episodes through a series of dreamlike and near-psychedelic vignettes.



Throughout these reimagined scenes Chetwynd playfully adapts and exaggerates scale, colour and gesture to dramatic effect, transposing the unexpected surreality and zest of her performative environments as microcosmic dioramas. Each variously teems with fantastical elements. In a scene from the life of *St. Cuthbert*, the exorcism of a feminine-presenting figure depicts a translucent speech bubble that springs from their lips to reveal a scarlet winged satanic figure who performs an impish dance. In *St. Cuthbert and the Sea Otters* – that describes the story of Cuthbert emerging from aquatic prayer to be dried by the breath and fur of otters – tiny figures are engulfed in a dazzling array of giant squid, eels and sea urchins; simultaneously conjuring a sense of joyful absurdity and wonderment for the natural world.

Set in comparison to Chetwynd's broader practice – which she describes as 'impatiently made' – and exuberant, spontaneously evolving performances, realising the commission involved working closely with skilled makers over a period of many months to produce the four intricate sculptures. The process conversely culminates with the glass taking form through rapid actions made before it cools. In this sense, the works self-reflexively embody a contained expression of collaboration and immediacy, as well as the multifarious approach to story-telling at the core of Chetwynd's work.

For this exhibition, Chetwynd has chosen to install the sculptures on domestic furniture, as a means of recontextualising and familiarising the formal viewing construct of a gallery setting. The use of repurposed furniture also extends the artist's pursuit of working with recycled and sustainable materials.

Shown in dialogue with the sculptures are two groups of watercolours that represent a recently initiated and ongoing experimentation into the relationship between performance and painting. Energetically made, the works act as both documentation and as a fixed site of performative action and its liminal gestures. With characters drawn directly from past performances or from imagination, their fluid, spontaneous and gestural scenographies convey the disruptive atmosphere of elation and mayhem found in the artist's performative practice.

Monster Chetwynd (b. 1973, London) has performed and exhibited internationally, and was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2012. Upcoming and recent projects include a commission with Art on the Underground at Gloucester Road opening in May 2023; a major new commission at Mount Stewart, Isle of Bute, to be unveiled in summer 2023; *The Life of St. Bede* a major commission made in collaboration with specialist teams at the National Glass Centre, presented by Glass Exchange at Durham Cathedral, Durham (2022); Migros Museum, The Löwenbräukunst-Areal, Zurich (2022); *Monster Loves Bats*, Konsthall C, Stockholm (2021); *Free Energy (The Life of Nikola Tesla)*, Studio Voltaire, London (2021); *Tears*, Messeplatz Art Basel, Basel (2021, and subsequently presented as part of *Art in a Day*, Copenhagen Contemporary, 2022); *Toxic Pillows*, De Pont, Tilburg, The Netherlands (2019); *Vision Verticale*, shown as part of *Day Tripper*, Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea, England (2019); *Monster Rebellion*, Villa Arson, Nice (2019); *Hell Mouth 3*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham (2019); *Winter Commission*, a prestigious annual commission presented on the gallery façade at Tate Britain, London (2018); *Ze & Per*, Sadie Coles HQ, London (2018); *The Green Room & Science Lab* and *The Panther Ejaculates*, Art Basel Parcours, Basel (both 2017); *Uptight upright, upside down*, CCA Glasgow (2016); *JABBA, I'M BACK!* and *Cocaine and Caviar*, Bergen Assembly, Norway (both 2016); *Dogsy Ma Bone*, Liverpool Biennial (2016); *Camshafts in the Rain*, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2016); *The King Must Die*, Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh (2015); *Hermitos Children 2 / Listen Up!*, Studio Voltaire, London (2014); and *The Green Room*, Nottingham Contemporary (2014). Chetwynd lives in Zürich, Switzerland.

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