

PRESS RELEASE

HELENA FOSTER: TO SEE BEYOND SEEING



02 MARCH – 15 APRIL 2023

PRIVATE VIEW: THURSDAY 02 MARCH, 6 – 8 PM

“Every act of imagination points implicitly to the dream... the dream is the first condition of its possibility.”
Michel Foucault

Simon Lee Gallery is pleased to present *To See Beyond Seeing*, a solo exhibition of new paintings on canvas, paper and copper exploring unconscious fate in everyday reality by Nigerian born, London based artist Helena Foster.

The dream-like characters and scenes in Foster's paintings vary from daily life to verging on the mystical. They are concerned with psychological or spiritual states, and subjects' agency in those circumstances. These heightened feelings are compounded by Foster's rich use of colour and layering of paint, which often results in figures becoming framed by, yet sometimes indistinguishable from, their surroundings.

Big Machine is the most dynamic in this new series of paintings. The work centres on a man running through a forest of green and violet ferns. The expressive brush strokes create a sense of urgency and momentum, while the hazy candy pink light falling on his face and shoulders is almost ecclesiastical. In *Awaken Me*, a man lying in long grasses of indigo and deep purple and highlighted by blue moonlight gazes at the timeless symbol of the realm between the conscious and unconscious. Stillness and contemplative moments are at the foreground of the two largest paintings in the exhibition, which are saturated with earthy tones of ochre and tobacco. The main character in *The Bread of Affliction* is the mask like face of Tiresias from the 1976 film of Oedipus Rex by Pasolini. Framed by a mountainous landscape, the grand character of the seer, a source of wisdom and prophecy, sits gazing at a swan and the inky shadows of the reflections in the ripples of water. The scene in *About Turn* is inspired by the film *La Femme Au Couteau* from 1969 made in Cote D'Ivoire, by Timité Bassori. A man disturbed from sleep sits up in bed, his dream interrupted by the ambiguous outline of a female figure in this shuttered room. Foster's painterly attention to the vivid colours of the bedspread and the beautifully rendered still life of flowers in their vase further heighten the discord between memory and reality. "The first mark is always the most true" says Foster of the tiniest jewels in this exhibition: mise-en-scènes painted on copper and barely a handspan big.

Vintage Nollywood and the heavily saturated colour and drama in 1970's Italian cinema; Greek mythology and English poetry around dream states and the subconscious - linking Sophocles and TS Eliot's *Wasteland*; Igbo history and biblical narratives are all part of Foster's rich and diverse archive and inspiration. This series of paintings by Foster is concerned with shadowy dreams, distant memories, mysticism of stories, duality, and the philosophical agency of the individual – whilst always demonstrating a curiosity towards, and reverence for, the practice of painting.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Helena Foster

Helena Foster was born in Nigeria in 1988 and lives and works in London, UK. Having graduated from Camberwell College of Art in 2010, Foster was awarded the Thamesmead Texas residency (London) in 2020 and the Terre Sans Frontières|And'Art residency (Morocco) in 2010. Recent exhibitions include Pablo's Birthday, New York, NY (2023), French Riviera, London, UK (2022), FF Projects, London, UK (2022), Brick Lane, London, UK (2022), The Sunday Painter, London, UK (2022), Septieme Gallery, Paris, France (2021), Bow Arts, London, UK (2020), Studio 1.1, London, UK (2019), Victoria Island, Lagos, NG (2019), Seesaw Studio, London, UK (2018), The Crypt Gallery, London, UK (2018), The Crows Nest Gallery, London, UK (2018), Art Hub Gallery, London, UK (2017), Remp Art Gallery, Marrakech, MA (2010), Tate Britain, London, UK (2009).

About Simon Lee Gallery

Founded in London in 2002, Simon Lee Gallery represents artists of diverse generations whose practices explore a wide range of media, from sculpture and painting to video and photography, and who share a broad interest in an exploration of the conceptual. Aiming to provide a significant international audience for its artists, the gallery also regularly punctuates its programme with historical exhibitions and curated group shows, which present shifts in contemporary art practice and thought, whilst broadening the dialogue with artists outside of the gallery's core programme. In addition to its UK activity, in 2012 the gallery opened a space in Hong Kong, which introduced its artists to a wider public in Asia, with a fully independent programme.

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Image: Helena Foster, *About Turn*, 2022-2023. Oil on linen, 170 x 120.5 cm (66 7/8 x 47 1/2 in). Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

For further press information, images and interview requests please contact: Jennifer@simonleegallery.com