

## Chris Ofili: *The Seven Deadly Sins*

Exhibition 2 June–29 July 2023

16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



**Chris Ofili**, *The Pink Waterfall* (detail), 2019–2023  
Oil and charcoal on linen  
310 x 200 cm  
122 x 78 3/4 in  
© Chris Ofili  
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

**Victoria Miro is delighted to present *The Seven Deadly Sins*, a major new series of paintings by Chris Ofili. Completed over the past six years, the works on view offer an expansive meditation on sin and the complex experience of sinfulness.**

In this series of works Chris Ofili contemplates the seven deadly sins – a subject with Biblical origins that bears fundamentally on the human condition and human behaviour.

The artist, raised as a Roman Catholic, had long wanted to work through the themes and associations – personal and broad-ranging – that gather around sin. Aware that this significant project would require the devotion of a substantial and unbroken period of time, he couldn't have foreseen that it would be the long intervals of enforced isolation accompanying the onset of the Covid pandemic which would occasion heightened reflection and introspection. Ofili has said of the resulting series of seven works, 'It felt like the right subject: for the time and for these times.'

The artist intended each painting not to cleave to a particular sin, but to encompass a spectrum of excessive and transgressive behaviours. For Ofili, 'There are seven days; each day is made of the same elements – the same hours – but each day turns out differently. Each work takes a slightly different approach, and one sin might become more dominant.'

Moving through dreamlike realms at once paradisiacal, other-worldly and cosmic, these works depict scenes where humans and mythological creatures co-exist. The natural world is fecund and mysterious in this territory of sinfulness, a place where magnetic forces of attraction and repulsion hold sway. It seems born of a liminal, trance-like state, perhaps between wake and sleep, when strange visions swim up into the mind's eye from a creative, playful place in the unconscious that has little to do with the strictures of rationality.

If these paintings symbolise the mind's innermost workings, then sin is almost a generating principle, catalysing internal dynamics of self-interrogation and self-knowledge. Although they are not simply autobiographical, Ofili found that their subject matter resonated with his formative religious education, and the impact on his psyche of ideas of right and wrong, guilt, innocence and confession. Here, sin and reflection go hand in hand: 'I think the works are more about the inner feelings one has about the sin – not necessarily only in the moment of committal – than about what happens afterwards, or the idea of judgement.'

In these works the artist's interrogations move beyond the straightforward dichotomies of good or bad, before and after; moral and temporal simultaneity are inextricably linked. Characters and events are suspended in a state of growth or motion as the artist seeks to expand the threshold of the moment – discrete instants becoming broad planes which can be inhabited and explored. As Ofili notes, 'Time can be conceptualised as a sweeping hand, rather than a ticking hand – I'm trying to find a sweep of time, rather than the mechanical units of time.'

**Accompanying the exhibition is a new publication: Ofili invited seven writers – Hilton Als, Inua Ellams, Marlon James, Anthony Joseph, Ayanna Lloyd Banwo, Atillah Springer and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye – to contribute new writing. Like Ofili's paintings, their poems and narratives are not confined to illustrating single sins but meditate, personally and expansively, on sinfulness.**

#### **About the artist**

**Chris Ofili** was born in Manchester, England, in 1968, and currently lives and works in Trinidad. 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 (2014–2015), 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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