

PRESS RELEASE

Verne Dawson
Hamlet's Mill

January 23 – March 14, 2026

Opening on Thursday, January 22, 6 – 8 pm

Waldmannstrasse 6, CH-8001 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Hamlet's Mill*, the gallery's seventh solo exhibition by the US-American artist Verne Dawson.

The universe is a strange and mysterious place, operated by unseen clocks, with plans for its inhabitants that they could never predict.

Sometimes a story tells itself.

In 2005, I was sitting in the office of an art gallery in Toronto when the owner said I needed to see something. He pushed a slim volume across his desk: an artist's book made by Verne Dawson to accompany his exhibition at Douglas Hyde Gallery, in Dublin. The images inside were compelling in ways that language couldn't articulate. We whispered about how special these paintings were, feeling profoundly connected to an artist we'd never met. Now it's twenty years later. I'm writing this press release for Verne's exhibition at Eva Presenhuber, which includes paintings of Crystal Springs in Saluda, North Carolina, where he sometimes lives, and where I've spent time at his invitation.

Something about my experience in 2005 felt preordained, as if I were meant to find Verne's book, and by doing so, enter some secret club. He worked in a language I understood, and his paintings helped develop my literacy. Today Verne and I are friends. He once painted my portrait.

The universe is a strange and mysterious place.

Hamlet's Mill refers to Giorgio de Santillana's 1969 book of the same name, in which he argues that worldwide myths are actually veiled descriptions of celestial mechanics, particularly the precession of the equinoxes; the glacially slow rotation of Earth's axis, which draws a circle in space every 26,000 years. Central to de Santillana's thesis is the idea that we underestimate our ancestor's intelligence; that what survives in their folklore is not superstition, but encoded knowledge. Dawson is similarly interested in this idea of lost literacy. His paintings illustrate a time when myth and science were not separate disciplines, and stories functioned as repositories of sophisticated cosmic observation. While works like *View From Milk Glass Cottage* (2025) and *Saluda Crystal Springs* (2025) appear to exist outside of time, Dawson is in fact obsessed with time. His paintings operate as both cosmological charts and acts of cultural preservation, fusing myth, anthropology, and the pastoral into a visual language that reclaims premodern modes of understanding the universe, and our place in it.

Humanity's endless pursuit of technological advancement—and unquestioning faith in technology's benefits—have led us to our current state, where there are epidemics of poor health, unhappiness, loneliness, and anxiety. While it's true that we can all tap an icon on our phones and have food—or shoes, or a mattress, or a new car—delivered to our homes almost instantly, it's also true that our detachment from nature and the cosmos has resulted in a populace desperate for meaning. Paranoid politics and sleazy conspiracies stepped up to fill the void, to everyone's detriment. Dawson, echoing de Santillana, suggests that by looking backwards—rather than blindly rushing forwards—we might find relief from our contemporary ailments, and rediscover a sense of purpose by reengaging with traditions we've long considered ourselves evolved from.

Dawson's paintings, however, never feel nostalgic, or pessimistic; a true feat. They're full of wonder, of real beauty and awe; aspects of the human experience too often drowned out by the ordinary hardships of life, by capitalism, by the noisy clamour of the present century. Instead they urge us to be hopeful. When I arrived in Saluda—to sleep in

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the house overlooking Crystal Springs—Dawson encouraged me to enjoy the landscape, to luxuriate in time as it moved at a slower and more ancient pace. I was invited to have a *different experience*, shorthand for a better one than I might have in Manhattan; less hurried, more connected to nature, and, in its way, instructive. We walked and drove through the hills. I learned the names of trees and plants, of families bound together by generational feuds. In painting scenes from Saluda, Dawson renders the microscopic macroscopic, so that a small town in the Blue Ridge Mountains seems to contain the entirety of human history—and prehistory. His paintings collapse time, revealing how the ordinary can be a vessel for the eternal. With a virtuosic gift for colour and line, he urges the viewer to look not at the phone in their hands but at the world beneath their feet—to look closely—because the natural world still astonishes, still blooms and blossoms unceasingly, if we only allow ourselves to slow down, as I did in Saluda. Dawson embodies both the zeal of an ecological activist and the faith of a mystic painter. His love for his subject is contagious.

Brad Philips

Verne Dawson's recent works are accompanied by two earlier paintings, *Atomic Bomb* (2007) and *The Old Mill Calendar* (2011). Together, they create a compelling narrative that bridges the artist's historical with his current body of work. The atomic bomb painting shows a colorful mushroom cloud rising into a bright blue sky. With its theme of destruction and the end of the human experience of the cosmos, this painting stands as an antithesis to the recent paintings in the main room, which depict rebirth through lush green landscapes. *The Old Mill Calendar* is presented in the final room of the exhibition. Conceived as a mural consisting of four large-format canvases, the work illustrates Earth's daily rotation, annual revolution around the sun, and slow 26,000-year axial cycle, known as the "Great Year" of the precession of the equinoxes. The mill is an ancient metaphor for this cycle, found in myth and fairy tales. As grain spills outward from the center of a millstone, so do the stars sweep across the firmament, circling the celestial pole. This piece was first exhibited at the Yokohama Triennial and Galerie Eva Presenhuber in 2011, and Art Basel Unlimited in 2012.

Verne Dawson was born in 1955 in Meridianville, Alabama, US, and lives and works in New York City, New York, US. Solo exhibitions include Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2006); Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (2005); and Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich, CH (2002). Dawson's work has also been featured in significant international events including the Yokohama Triennial, Yokohama, JP (2011); the Whitney Biennial, New York City, NY (2010); and the Lyon Biennial, Lyon, FR (2006).

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