

Carl Freedman Gallery
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BILLY CHILDISH

18th September – 26th October 2013

The Carl Freedman Gallery is proud to present a solo exhibition by Billy Childish, his first in a commercial gallery in the UK.

While Childish is known for a prodigious range of activities – garage punk musician, poet, writer and publisher – this exhibition aims to enhance the viewers' appreciation of his paintings. For the last few years Childish has devoted most of his time to being in his studio, and the resulting paintings have developed in scale and range of expressive qualities. Their intense visionary style and commanding presence make them unusually powerful paintings, and are quite a departure from his earlier small, Kirchner-like works often made on small found wooden panels.

Much of Childish's strongly autobiographical work places the artist at its centre. In some of his more recent paintings the figure of the artist has been deferred in favour of archetypes, whether known historical figures such as Edward Elgar and Charles Bukowski or nameless oyster boat sailors and dock workers who once populated the river Medway and Chatham dockyards, where Childish grew up and now has a studio.

While the motifs of the river and boatmen are universal themes, many of Childish's paintings are connected to the locales of the Thames and Medway estuaries. The estuary has a particular resonance as a place where water (time) flows in both directions, and where eddying currents are met with stillness and relative tranquility. The icebergs of *glacier bay (1907)* (2013) have a certain stillness too, as do the water reflections, the bare canvas and the poses of the figures in other paintings, creating moments of calm which play off directly against the hallucinatory palette, the dynamic compositions, and the immediacy of thought and action expressed by liquid outlines and rapid brush strokes.

As a writer and poet it's no surprise that Childish has a lot of literary influences, which have been predominantly American and Russian. As Childish explains in a recent interview "I don't really get on with the English aesthetic. I describe myself as someone who refuses to be English. I read a lot of Bukowski and John Fante, later Walt Whitman when I was 20 or so. However as a young man I was quite a fan of Conrad. And he was a local man to Kent. And I live with a little view of the river from the window. On the Medway we are a couple of miles from the Thames where the book is narrated by Marlow, when they are at anchor off Tilbury. It's evening time. Marlow talks about where the lights of London are coming up and that 'darkness was here yesterday', comparing it to the Congo. Even if I'm painting a lonely boat chugging along a Washington river, for some reason I always think of *Heart of Darkness*. There was never a heart of darkness here, where I live, as far as I was concerned, if you look at the history of the area. I just thought it was such a great title. I don't think there's a heart of darkness any place on earth."

There will be a number of events during the exhibition, more details will be released. Recent international solo exhibitions include neugerriemschneider, Berlin, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York and China Art Objects, Los Angeles.

The exhibition will be open from Tuesday – Friday 11 – 6 pm and Saturday 12 – 6 pm, otherwise by appointment. The private view is from 6-8pm on Tuesday 17th September.

For interview requests, images and further information please contact the gallery on +44 20 7684 8890, or email info@carlfreedman.com