

# TOTAH

DAVID AUSTEN

*The Last Trapeze Artist*

November 11th, 2021 - February 5th, 2022

TOTAH presents *The Last Trapeze Artist*, featuring new works by London-based artist David Austen, on view from November 11th, 2021. This is the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

Incorporating painting, watercolor, gouache, and film, the world-creating artistry of David Austen literalizes the fictitiousness of narratives. Alluding to the uncanniness of myth and fairytale, and the all-too-quiet closure of stories, Austen's works are artifacts torn from a world gowned in the flesh of our own, even as they introduce viewers to a place that is intrinsically surprising and strange.

Threading through *The Last Trapeze Artist* is an intimacy of touch that applies to Austen's small watercolors as much as his large-scale oil paintings. Works like *Green Tree* and *Hearts of Glass* are the stylized documents of what a traveler might glimpse in his momentary world. In *Green Tree*, the landscape where the woman has her place is inaccessible to language. Her gaze looks out toward the viewer, but in a way that suggests indifference to his presence. Her arborescent head, just like her expressionless face, seems removed from the canvas, coming across as incomplete, truncated.

Another large-scale work, *Fires*, features a field of erupting small flames. An elemental companion to Austen's *Ocean* series, which portrays raiments of stars over intense oil-colored hues, the simplified flame motif conveys a sense of mystery reminiscent of medieval artworks. But the result is neither allegorical nor entirely figurative. Despite the denial of realism with which the flames are painted, a kind of cautionary tale is described.

In Austen's silent 16mm film work, *The Gorgon's Dream*, a woman seems to interpenetrate the space surrounding her face, until the viewer realizes that she has been beheaded. Held by her hair in a man's fist, she perpetually withdraws from the viewer, even as her eyes open and her wakening presence to the viewer becomes all the more certain. A dream-like porousness, an ever-shifting instability, surrounds the contours of Austen's actors. Naked, shamed, expelled to a paradise of abstraction, they sputter a staggered semaphore that portrays mournfulness as a form of hope.

*David Austen was born in Harlow, UK in 1960 and studied at Maidstone College of Art and the Royal College of Art in London. His works are held in several public collections including TATE, London, Arts Council England, the Government Art Collection and British Council, UK, as well as in numerous private collections in the UK, Europe and the US. He lives and works in London.*

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