

November 21, 2020 – January 23, 2021

Sikkema Jenkins & Co. is pleased to present *River*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Merlin James, on view November 21, 2020 through January 23, 2021.

Central to James' recent work is the artist's daily, nuanced awareness of the view from his home in Glasgow, looking out to the River Clyde and surrounding environments. These paintings constitute a "familiar remembered image, a cumulative memory," incorporating all the "inaccuracies or approximations" of his own recollection.

Works like *Dredge* or *The Window* present very much a specific location, yet a sense of the artificial and the universal is carried through the imaginative scale and coloration. Painting neither directly from life nor from photographs, James draws on impressions and recollections over time to bring to life familiar spaces and the presences that populate them.

The physicality of painting remains a central focus. The raw material of canvas is frequently as integral to the complete work as the paint applied upon it. In some paintings James has made incisions to reveal the stretcher bars or contribute to imagery, while other works have semi-transparent surfaces, veiling information beneath. The stretcher (always fashioned by the artist himself) can become a visual, even sculptural feature. Idiosyncratic picture frames are also a frequent feature.

While acknowledging poetry and music as touchstones, James insists upon the medium of painting, and the range of genres inherent to it, as a distinct field of art production. Within his visual morphology, abstract shapes transform into landscape motifs, landscape and figure elements combine with still life objects. In these latest works, such complexities of form and convention articulate some of the artist's most candid statements to date. Writing of French painter Jean Siméon Chardin, he notes:

*Personal human narrative is in no way eclipsed by the formal and depictive work and play going on in the painting. It is continuous with them. Pictorial ambiguity and complexity prevents us from seeing the painting merely as a biographical document but, despite or because of that, permits us to entertain as full a human narrative as the picture will sustain.\**

Born in Cardiff, Wales, in 1960, Merlin James studied in London at the Central School of Art and the Royal College of Art. He currently lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland. James' work has been exhibited widely, including in recent solo shows at A-M-G5, Glasgow, UK (2018); OCT Boxes Museum, Shunde & OCT Art and Design Gallery, Shenzhen (2018); Long Game, CCA Glasgow (2016); Kunstverein Freiburg (2014); Parasol Unit, London; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2013). In 2007 James represented Wales at the 52nd Venice Biennale. He also curates the exhibition space 42 Carlton Place, in Glasgow.

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**UPCOMING ART FAIRS:**

ART BASEL OVR: MIAMI BEACH      DEC. 2 – 6, 2020

**HOLIDAY CLOSINGS:**

THANKSGIVING      NOV. 26 – 30  
WINTER BREAK      DEC. 24, 2020 – JAN. 1, 2021

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\* Merlin James, *A Lady Taking Tea* by Jean Siméon Chardin, (London: Modern Art Press, 2020), 42-43.