



JAMES DEARLOVE | TALES OF THE CITY, TALES OF THE SEA

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

James Dearlove (born 1970) holds an MA in Fine Art from The Slade School of Art, and has also attended the Turps Banana Art School. He currently lives and works in Cornwall, having transitioned to painting following a successful career in Television production.

In 2021 Dearlove was awarded the Ingram Prize; one of the UK's leading prizes for emerging contemporary artists. In 2023 Dearlove was chosen for the prestigious Bloomberg New Contemporaries. His artwork has also been featured in ArtMaze Magazine, FAD, i-D and HERO Magazine, amongst other publications.

Dearlove has exhibited extensively in the UK since he began painting. His work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions at galleries that include Arch Gallery, Rye Art Gallery, Gallery 46, Unit 1 Gallery, Studio 1.1 and BWG Gallery. His work has also been exhibited in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (2019), been selected for the ING Discerning Eye exhibition at Mall Galleries (2021), and was exhibited at Saatchi Gallery (2022) as part of the Ingram Collection's presentation of modern and contemporary art at the British Art Fair. In 2021 Dearlove held his first solo exhibition *The Garden Room* at Nine Elms Gallery.

In 2022 Dearlove attended the Cyprus College of Art on a one-month artist residency and was selected to attend the Colstoun Artist Residency in Scotland in 2023.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work presents a twilight, chimerical world haunted by figures, animals and hybrids.

I am preoccupied with how humans leave a trace of their presence both as individuals and collectively on the world; the way a figure can electrify a room, the trajectory of a firework across the sky.

My paintings capture the visceral presence of the human figure; light falling on flesh; or bodies coalescing with their surroundings. However, they are also concerned with more metaphysical and sometimes violent collisions between humans and the natural world. Figures transform into birds; a vortex of shipwrecked bodies and jellyfish intermingle. I am fascinated by how marks on a surface can at once create and destroy and how those same marks can fetishise both the medium of paint and the subject I am painting equally. Some of my works are painted on newspaper and I enjoy and seek to exploit the way the newsprint interrupts the painted surface with a kind of soft violence.

Ultimately, my paintings explore both the desire and the disquietude in the human experience through my own experience as a queer man living and working both in the heart of the city and more recently in rural isolation.

JAMES DEARLOVE | TALES OF THE CITY, TALES OF THE SEA

EXHIBITION TEXT

Jack Trodd | Stephen Baycroft

The artwork presented in multi-award-winning artist James Dearlove's solo exhibition *Tales of the City, Tales of the Sea* at BWG Gallery, includes paintings from the last 2 years installed throughout the gallery's 3 rooms. In these paintings Dearlove imagines the contemporary human experience, issues of modern society and his own personal journey, using depictions of human bodies, many of whom are heaped together and set adrift in urban or rural landscapes, that are haunted by animals and therianthropic beings composed of human and animal body parts. A spectator may have uncanny experiences of Dearlove's twilight paintings, because they arouse feelings of an unhomey sense of unfamiliarity, in an otherwise homely sense of familiarity.

The title of this exhibition was inspired by the musician PJ Harvey's album *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea*, and alludes to both Dearlove's move from London to live by the coast in Southwest England; and his life as a queer person in the heart of a city and now the remote countryside. Dearlove's life experiences have led him to use his paintings to blur and transgress the boundaries between dualistic oppositions such as natural and cultural, rural and urban, light and dark, desire and disquietude, intimacy and alienation, and figuration and abstraction.

Paintings in the front room of the exhibition reveal human rites of passage through cityscapes of high-rise flats, fluorescent lighting and twilight phosphorescence, in which faceless human beings exist on a knife edge between solvency and bankruptcy, community and desolation, and survival and mortality. The passageway between the front and main rooms of the exhibition includes paintings of human figures, whose submarine (*Culvert with Figures and Swans*, 2023) and spiritualist mediumistic (*Figure with Ectoplasm*, 2023) rites of passage have made them alienated outsiders in the city. Paintings in the main room of the exhibition depict human figures who have been set adrift on rafts in an oceanic nothingness (*Figures Adrift*, 2022); sun-drenched on a beach communicating and communing with non-human beings (*Three Figures and Setting Sun (after Craxton)*, 2023); and shipwrecked carcasses that are seemingly unaware of their plight (*Cornish Landscape with Figures and Sea Creatures*, 2022). Paintings in the final room of the exhibition portray perverse perceptions of queer life, in the two mirroring paintings of naked unconscious figures voyeuristically watched by film equipment (*Figures on a Bed*, 2021 and *Figures on a Bed 2*, 2023). Queer life is also alluded to in Dearlove's use of bird-human forms, that symbolise both animal violence in general; and human homosexual violence in particular (*Soda Lake Landscape with Figures and Birds*, 2021).

The 3 rooms in the exhibition are united by an installation in which lamps and chairs tumble over the spectator's head. This installation alludes to an irruption of the atmospheric environment in the painting *Figures Adrift*; that allows visitors to share the same inability as the figures in this painting to use this aerial furniture. The feeling of anxiety and alienation aroused by such uncanny experiences, also alludes to the uncanny feelings of loneliness or abandonment experienced by many human beings, who are, paradoxically, interconnected by digital technologies. Dearlove offsets the sense of disillusion pervading the works in this exhibition, by including references to the healing rural landscapes in which he has found solace.

Dearlove's use of deacidified newspaper on canvas as the background for many of his paintings, systematically allows the mechanically reproduced words and images on such newspaper both to literally deform a spectator's experiences of the painted figures that appear to float on its surface; and to metaphorically allude to the distant, apprehensive, deforming effects on the human mind and body, of the seemingly never-ending and relentless twenty-four-hour cycles of news and current affairs.

Like the painter Francis Bacon, Dearlove's paintings reflect an artistic interest in uncanny experiences of unhomey domestic interiors; paranormal phenomena; therianthropic hybridisations; and photographic source material. The main artistic influence on Dearlove's paintings, however, lies in the work of Neo-Romantic artists like Keith Vaughan and John Craxton; all of whom (like Bacon) reacted not only to the sense of threat and paranoia which pervaded British society after the Second World War, but also that of homosexual oppression, by painting human figures in atmospheric environments that were pervaded by either sombre darkness or brilliant sunlight.

Unlike these artistic predecessors, however, Dearlove's interest in Ballardian science-fiction and his contemplation of the zeitgeist, allows him to respond to the climate emergency, capitalism's economic unsustainability, and the socio-political normalisation of far-right ideologies and cancel culture; by making paintings that depict the 'swirling emotional storm of living through such turbulent, unpredictable times', in which human beings struggle to achieve harmonious relationships with other beings and their environments.