

# CLAERWEN JAMES

21 Cork Street  
London W1S 3LZ

16 May- 23 June 2018  
Private View Tuesday 15 May 6-8PM

T: 020 7439 7766  
press@flowersgallery.com  
www.flowersgallery.com

Flowers Gallery is pleased to present new work by British figurative painter Claerwen James. Quietly enigmatic, James' paintings of youthful female subjects are not portraits in the usual sense of the word. Painting from photographs, she frequently works with anonymous images, scouring car boot sales and junk shops for magazines and film stills, alongside her own photographed images and family pictures. With the identity of each subject considered unimportant, she denies the instinct to try to make sense of the captured photographic moment in concrete narrative terms.

As Ruth Scurr writes in the catalogue essay, three of the four figures in the present exhibition are revisited and modified from past works. Their faces are presented again in her latest paintings, according to Scurr, to "[challenge] herself and her public to look again at the unknowing knowingness of children on the threshold of adult worlds."<sup>1</sup>

While the sitter's gaze is directed towards an unseen photographer, James sets herself at a deliberate remove from this exchange, responding to the frozen photographic record and investing it with a wholly imaginative second life. For James, these captured moments are fraught with a sense of time slipping away, forming an "impassable gulf" between the past and present. Her subjects are often children, whose natural state of imminent transformation and growth highlights the potency of the captured fragment of time. Adam Gopnik has described her paintings as being "like X-rays of child potentialities",<sup>2</sup> for which any manner of stories could be invented.

The alert facial expressions and arrested gestures of the children are ambiguous, seeming at times to be pensive and lost in private worlds, and at others to be speaking out, their messages trapped within the 'gulf' of then and now. Gopnik says: "The tension between the scrupulous observational honesty of her hands and faces and the aerated beauty of her touch is what gives her pictures their mystery and their life."<sup>3</sup>

Echoes from art history resonate throughout her paintings, and James cites Corot, Degas and Picasso's early blue and rose periods as unfailing sources of "ideas and provocations". These echoes can be found in the silvery tones of her waif-like figures and the quietly radiating coloured grounds of the empty spaces they occupy.

For press images and more information please contact: Hannah Hughes, hannah@flowersgallery.com / 020 7920 7777



*Girl in a Leotard Against a Dark sky*, 2018, Oil on canvas,  
163 x 99 cm, 64 1/8 x 39 in

1. Ruth Scurr, *Claerwen James*, Exhibition Catalogue, Flowers Gallery, 2018  
2 & 3. Adam Gopnik, *Claerwen James*, *Seeing*, Exhibition Catalogue, Flowers Gallery, 2015

## ABOUT CLAERWEN JAMES

Claerwen James, born in 1970, originally trained as a molecular biologist at Oxford University, University College London and Cold Spring Harbor, NY. She graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2003. James has won various awards such as the Prince's Drawing School Graduate Bursary; the Arts Club Excellence in Drawing Award; and most notably the Slade School's own Melvill Nettleship Prize for Figure Composition - previous winners include Gwen John and Gwen Raverat. She has gone on to have numerous exhibitions in the UK and the US. Her work is included in the collection of Jesus College, Cambridge.



Images, clockwise from top right: *Girl With Pale Hair and a Pale Green Dress*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 162.5 x 116.5 cm, 64 x 45 7/8 in; *Girl With a Butterfly, Pink Against Blue*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 163 x 99 cm, 64 1/8 x 39 in; *Girl With a Ukulele 1*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 163 x 99 cm, 64 1/8 x 39 in; *Girl in a Leotard Against Pale Blue*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 162.5 x 142 cm, 64 x 55 7/8 in

Opening hours: Monday - Saturday 10am - 6pm.

All images (C) Claerwen James, Courtesy of Flowers Gallery London and New York