

KEN CURRIE

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Private View Tuesday 7 November 6-8PM

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Since the early 1990s, Scottish artist Ken Currie has been known for his closely observed and often unsettling portrayal of the body, depicting the damage inflicted by war and conflict, illness and decay as a response to what he felt was the sickness of contemporary society. Currie's rich, luminous paintings address the tragic themes of modernity, balancing the opposing imagery of mechanised destruction and degradation with the generative, creative potential of the human body.

The works in the present exhibition depict the figure transformed by acts of unseen violence or engaged in mysterious medical procedures. The nightmarish painting *Krankenhaus* portrays ailing subjects treated with arcane medical instruments in a makeshift surgery, uncannily juxtaposing paraphernalia from the abattoir and misplaced players from a military band.



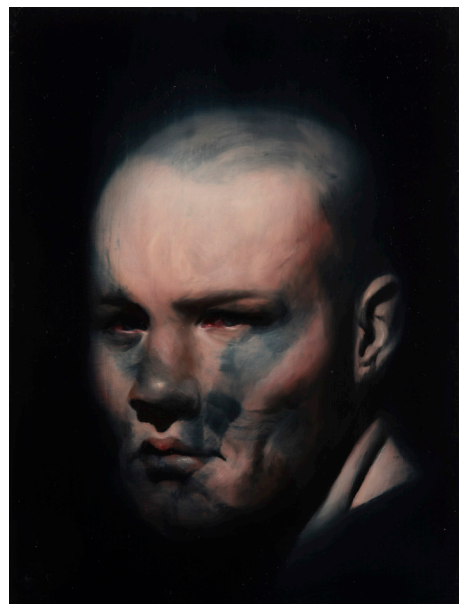
*Ken Currie, Whitened Hands, 2017,
Oil on panel, 46 x 61 cm, 18 1/8 x 24 1/8 in*

Alongside this painting, a series of images titled *War Paint* marks Currie's continued inquiry into facial disfigurement, portraying young men with strong youthful features transformed by war into what Currie calls "*monstrous violations of all our ideals of beauty and harmony*". In these works, Currie pays homage to the images of reconstructive surgery recorded by British artist and former surgeon Henry Tonks during World War I. Veiled references to the scars of war can be seen in the bruise-like blue-blacks of the over-painting, lending the works a disturbing edge of barely concealed trauma.

The theme of disfigurement continues in the painting *Rictus*, from which the exhibition takes its title, and which relates to a fixed grimace or grin. Within this painting a military general can be seen studying a portrait of a survivor of atomic warfare. The portrait itself is intended to be difficult to look at, as Currie sets out to expose the true human cost of mechanised combat, with grotesque distortions, misplaced eye sockets and lolling mouth cavity. The character of the officer, inspired in part by John Singer Sargent's painting *General Officers of the Great War* faces away from the viewer, his reaction shielded from view.

In contrast, two smaller paintings titled *The Lime Bucket*, and *Whitened Hands* depict hands scrubbed and dripping with lime solution, a substance usually intended to degrade or decontaminate. Relating back to the mysterious procedures in many of Currie's quasi-medical scenes, the symbolism is shrouded in ambiguity, as though stemming from partially-recalled moral emblems or allegories for contemporary life.

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



Left: *Rictus*, 2015, Oil on Linen, 137 x 122 cm, 54 x 48 1/8 in

Right, from top: *The Lime Bucket*, 2017, Oil on panel 46 x 61 cm, 18 1/8 x 24 1/8 in; *War Paint #3*, 2017, Oil on panel, 40.5 x 30.5 cm, 16 x 12 1/8 in

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ABOUT KEN CURRIE

Ken Currie was born in 1960, and studied at the Glasgow School of Art from 1978 - 1983. He was known as one of the New Glasgow Boys along with Peter Howson, Adrian Wisniewski and the late Steven Campbell who studied together at the Glasgow School of Art. Notable public works include a mural commissioned by Glasgow Museums to mark the bicentenary of the Calton Weavers Massacre, which is displayed in the dome of the People's Palace, Glasgow; and a portrait of eminent medical scientists Professor R. J. Steele, Professor Sir Alfred Cuschieri, and Professor Sir David P. Lane, in *Three Oncologists*, which was initiated by the National Galleries of Scotland.

Currie has exhibited widely internationally, including a recent solo exhibition at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; and has been selected for numerous group shows including *The Scottish Endarkenment: Art and Unreason 1945 to Present* at Dovecot Gallery, Edinburgh, 2016; *Reality, Modern & Contemporary British Painting* at The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich and Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; and *Drawing Breath*, a touring exhibition marking ten years of the Jerwood Drawing Prize. His work is in the collections of Yale Centre for British Art, Connecticut; Tate, London; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; New York Public Library; Imperial War Museum, London; Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon; Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery, Australia; British Council, London; Boston Museum of Fine Art; and ARKEN, Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen.

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