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Press Release

Phantasmagoria

5 April - 4 May 2024

13 Tottenham Mews, London

Opening: 4 April, 6 - 8pm

Featuring artists Caroline Absher, Grace Bromley, Connie Harrison, Cheung Tsz Hin, Antonia Caicedo Holguín, Yowshien Kuo, Jack McGarrity, Kate Pincus-Whitney, Kristian Touborg, Jiajia Wang, Tianyue Zhong.

*I seize the sphery harp. I strike the strings.
At the first sound the golden sun arises from the deep...
The echo wakes the moon to unbind her silver locks,
The golden sun bears on my song
And nine bright spheres of harmony rise round the fiery king . . .*
WILLIAM BLAKE, 'Enitharmon Revives with Los'

The etymology of the word 'phantasmagoria' stems from *phántasma* ("ghost") + *agorá* ("assembly"). A gathering of spectres. Many of the works on display in the present exhibition, by artists working across three continents, bear the traces of the past's incisive presence, and of successive breakthroughs in art history reimagined anew, like ghosts in our own time. 'Poetry survives because it haunts and it haunts because it is simultaneously utterly clear and deeply mysterious', wrote Nobel Laureate Louise Glück, and 'because it cannot be entirely accounted for, it cannot be exhausted.' The artists assembled here paint like Glück's brief for the poet. These works are at once clear and mysterious, truthful yet arcane. In their eclecticism of forms, the gathered paintings oscillate between figurative imaginings of leisurely landscapes and idle objects, sonorous distributions of abstract paint, and the human body trapped in liminal spaces between dreamscapes and waking life. Spurred the imaginative power William Blake expressed in his 'prophetic books', according to which the texture of dreams was not mere fantasy but an essential part of life, this group of artists address the world of forms that meet at the threshold between the cold light of experience and the wildness of dreams.

In her polychromatic visions of remembered landscapes, Connie Harrison's compositions smoulder in flickering patchworks, revealing dense mark-making from scraped oil and wax which blur the distinctions between the magnified flowers in the foreground and the wild vegetation beyond. The palette and layered brushstrokes share something with Claude Monet's enigmatic late period, and his gestural reworkings of his Japanese water-lily garden at Giverny; the title, *Leaves to blossom, fall to nourish* captures that pendulous flow of seasonal transformation. Elsewhere, in a riotous still life-cum-collage, Kate Pincus-Whitney incorporates weighty tomes by Hilma af Klimt and Aldous Huxley, artistic forebears who sought to represent the fantastical worlds of the imagination unbound by corporeal function, alongside Bacchanalian treats like a bottle of St. John's 2012 Bourgogne and fresh lobster. *Ritual Union: Hecate's Garden (Faith in a Seed)* (2024), which refers to the Greek goddess of magic and necromancy and who was the inspiration for Blake's character Enitharmon, is a garden of earthly delights lost to modern excess. Elsewhere, middle-aged holidaymakers cavort, exercise, and stare at one another in an arcadian dream in Antonia Caicedo Holguín's oil-on-linen *Day Dream* (2023), which reimagines Paul Cézanne's bathers in a halcyon scene of middle-aged abandon to leisure. *A Sidelong Glance* (2023) might depict a millennial cast of characters instead, but there remains a timelessness to the hazy play of grassy verge and baby-blue sky, as though this is what we might imagine paradise looks like – if in paradise we retain the worldly desire to control how we present ourselves and a capacity for relentless self-scrutiny.

As such, another way of thinking about the phantasmagorical nature of image production is to recognize the disjuncture between dream and reality, between the false floods of desire and the murky truths that lurk behind

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the beatific facade. Jack McGarrity's *Package Deal* (2024) takes on this subject. Like Caicedo Holguin, McGarrity depicts an idyllic sojourn: here, tourists on a precarious vessel astride glistening Greek isles, as wildfires pump smoke into paradise. Interspersed with collaged strips torn asunder and the surface lightly sanded, the water shimmers with the incandescent luminosity of a saint's day parade, while the bunting stretches out wet and damp. Nothing is as it should be. The same is true of Yowshien Kuo's acrylic and leaf foil *Ra Ra Return!* (2024), in which three young friends repose on quilts in a nocturnal field of blue barley while six black horses stand guard or else plan an assault on the unsuspecting idlers. The composition is a total environment of the artist's imagination: real in the sense that each part is true to life yet inconceivable as a whole, and so feels as though seen through a lucid dream. Two works by Fabian Ramirez, *Dreaming of the Serpent (you)* and *Dreaming of the Serpent (me)*, position our perspective above two nude figures, each of whom are reclined in a duvet and seduced by serpents. A modern reimagining of the Genesis myth, Ramirez's diptych encapsulates the dangers and the gratifications of temptation: these are visceral paintings of human bodies having lost a grip on their reality.

If some artists have approached the subject of imagined, remembered, or invented landscapes, then others avail themselves with abstract topographies to examine the ways in which painting (and, perhaps, painting alone) can depict the non-physical, timeless, and unchangeable essences of forms. In Grace Bromley's *Vital Heat* (2024), it is as though we see a rendering of high temperature spatialized onto the canvas. The conflation of oblong, arching, and ovoid forms force themselves in space, integrating and dissolving with one another, while impossibly thin white lines radiate a sense of heat and movement. Similarly, Jiajia Wang's *Tree#90 Hot* (2024) is also interested in the degree of heat or intensity invested into abstract shapes, and depicts a hallucinatory universe of smudged boundary lines and interwoven diagonals. It is a chaotic but effervescent composition that nevertheless speaks to the Blakean maxim of art's purpose: to 'work up imagination to the state of vision.' In *Fuel* (2023) by Tianyue Zhong, we are confronted by an altogether different emotional temperature. Recalling the abstraction of Joan Mitchell and Zou Wou-Ki, and rendering the abstract but existential burden of resource extraction with a scrawled surface that manages to be resolved and equivocal at the same time, Zhong has found an expressive vocabulary to deal with our collective nightmare with a singular touch.

For other artists in *Phantasmagoria*, the human body is hauntingly present but defamiliarized like a spectre projected against a wall of shadow. Inspired by the experience of false awakenings, or a vivid dream about awakening from slumber, Cheung Tze Hin's *Dream Within a Dream* (2024) conjures up the quality of seeing the mathematical wonders of the natural world up close—a dendritic pattern on a frozen lake, for instance, or the balmy marks that bees leave in an apiary—before we see the frightening presence of a human arm and a leg, as though a body trapped is under a tinfoil avalanche. In Caroline Absher's oil, *Face of the Wind* (2024), the whirring energy scatters pastel pinks and oranges across the canvas as the faint outline of a head and torso with whirling red forefingers pointed at the ground appears lost in a haze of purple ticker tape. A similar sense of the human form lost to reality can be identified in Kristian Tobourg's three enigmatic dreamscapes: *Black Swan From Beneath* (2022), *Sheltering a Burning Hope from the Foolish Fire we Started* and *Intangible Grasp* (both 2023). Illuminated in white like the shadow play of the Victorian magic lantern (or the *phantasmagorie*, which projected friezes of skeletons, demons, and ghosts, onto walls, smoke, or semi-transparent screens to create a séance-like atmosphere), the figure in *Intangible Grasp* is animated by an otherworldly aspect. Could the 'intangible grasp' refer to the insubstantial grip that we have on our realities? Might this painting, and indeed all of the paintings on show, be about the paradoxical requirement for us to abstract our senses in order to see the world more clearly? Like Blake with his sphery harp before them, these artists relish in the joys of mark-making to ask more of us at a time when realities have never been harder to accept, and the need for new ways of expressing our changing relationship to the world more urgent.

—Matthew James Holman

About the artists

Caroline Absher (b. 1994, South Carolina) holds a BA Art History Degree and a BFA Painting Degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. In recent years, Absher has become known for her energetic and highly intuitive paintings that shift styles and techniques in search of an ecstatic iteration of her subjects and their surroundings. Equal parts abstract formations and lyrical brushwork, her paintings draw on the artist's time as a solo world traveller, in-depth study of art history, and her early years in New York City spent building frames of colour and texture in the third dimension on movie sets. Absher's paintings are often full of mesmerising figures wrapped

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in rich atmosphere, employing transparent washes and musical strokes to articulate epic natural phenomena and human wonder. In her most recent work, images may leap out or hide for a while, depending on the day, light, and mood of the viewer. Rather than capturing a version of reality, Absher brings the transcendental and subconscious world to life, bridging the gap between external and internal, inferring a collective and infinite ephemerality. Highlights of recent solo exhibitions include *'Back to Oz'*, Fredericks & Freiser, NY (2023); The Journal Gallery at Tennis Elbow, NY (2022); *'Earthbound'*, Makasiini Contemporary, Turku, Finland (2022). Recent group exhibitions include *'City Life'* with V1 Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark (2024); *'Apocalypse Now'* with The Journal Gallery, Patmos, Greece (2023); *'Botany of Desire'* with Swivel Gallery, NY (2024), and *'Women of Now'* with The Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas (2021). Her work is in the permanent collection of The Portland Museum of Art, USA. Caroline is represented by Fredericks & Freiser in New York.

Grace Bromley (b. 1994, Chicago) earned a BFA in Painting from School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and will be receiving her MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University in Spring of 2024. Her work addresses interpersonal relationships through a mythic lens. Diffused within vibrant fields of colour, these figurative works function as encrypted self-portraits. Inspired by a catholic upbringing, the way that biblical stories shaped her relationship to images and storytelling, as well as growing up in a household with three generations of women. Narrative story arcs and mythologies help to discern Bromley's fraught relationship with domesticity, mortality, strength, compassion and caretaking. Navigating these concepts through a physicality of material and density of layering, memories and dreams become indistinguishable, as the human is from an animal or the body from space. The process of morphing and mutating is essential to Grace's practice, as it is important that things are layered and embedded both conceptually as well as materially. Through this process, she reflects upon what becomes embedded in us, and the ambiguous state of metamorphosis and becoming. Highlights of recent group exhibitions include *'Peculiar Countenance'*, D.D.D.D Pictures, NY (2023); *'My Secret Place'*, Mozuku Gallery, Taiwan (2022); *'They're on To You'*, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, NY (2022). She participated in Spring/Break Art Show Los Angeles as well as New York City as an Independent Curator in 2023. She is the Recipient of the New American Paintings Emerging Artist Grant, 2023.

Connie Harrison (b. 1994, London) graduated from the Chelsea College of Arts, after completing a foundation at New College, Nottingham. To Harrison, the natural world is both a muse and subject. She works by overlaying landscapes with different compositions, building up an overall sense of an abstracted landscape. Areas of the painting are carved away leaving marks, like pathways that lead you in, or exposing roots that lie beneath. The paintings themselves are balanced and appear weightless, suspended limitless within her abstractions. Colours hover and are meticulously placed over layers of opaque wax paste. Organic, natural forms and elements of landscapes, float between foreground and background, in and out of familiarity. Through their varied surfaces, compositions emerge slowly through a process of layering and stripping away oil paint and a wax paste. Throughout the painting process parts of the surface unfold in texture, mark, opacity and colour, which overlay and entwine with one another; simulating movement and adding depth to the imagery as if they are growing. Her process is a metaphor to the natural rhythms and circular life cycles. Paintings grow organically, layer by layer, working on and developing an underlying pattern, like leaves and sedimentary rock. There is a juxtaposition to the surface, deep mark making and exposed areas reveal traces of the painting below. Highlights of recent exhibitions include *'New Now'*, Guts Gallery, London (2024, group); *'In Midst, Unfolding'*, Informality Gallery, London (2023, solo), *'Knitted Hedges'*, Blue Shop Gallery, London (2023, solo), *'Nurtured Furrows'*, Arusha Gallery, Edinburgh (2022, solo). Connie is represented by LUCE gallery in Turin, Italy.

Cheung Tsz Hin (b. 1987, Hong Kong) obtained a Bachelors of Integrated BBA from The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2010, and a Masters of Fine Arts in Taipei in 2014. Tsz-Hin has been focused on exploring the connections and tensions between himself and the era in which he lives, as well as the people surrounding him. Various scenes and objects in his daily life trigger a revisiting and recollection of moments from his life. Although he cannot definitively determine if these moments truly existed or if they are a blend of imagination and reality, the emotions he experiences, such as regret, struggle, melancholy, and happiness, are both tangible and elusive. They provide a pathway towards reconciling with his past. The multitude of thoughts and events from his life are depicted through multiple layers of paint, ranging from translucent to opaque. For Cheung, painting is a cherished opportunity to remember, encapsulate, and learn from those seemingly insignificant moments in life. It is as if he is writing a love letter to both the past and the present. Highlights of recent exhibitions include *'spinelessly planting'* at Contemporary by Angela Li, Hong Kong (2022); *'the garden i still vaguely remember'*, Contemporary by Angela Li, Hong Kong (2021); *'Ólafsfjörður: Phase 2'*, Sansiao Gallery, Hong Kong (2019). Cheung is represented by Contemporary by Angela Li in Hong Kong.

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Antonia Caicedo Holguín (b. 1997, Cali, Columbia) is a Colombian painter based in London, UK. Antonia graduated with an MA from the Slade School of Fine Art in June 2023. Her work weaves together fragments of her Colombian heritage and her experiences in London. Antonia's pieces blend moments of life, memory, and imagination, portraying loved ones, including friends and family, who are transformed and pushed into imagination and become fictional individuals, as literary characters who are often inspired from real people. Drawing inspiration from contemporary painters like Paula Rego and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, as well as old masters such as Manet and La Tour, Antonia's forms come to life through oil paint and unconventional materials like coffee grounds, coffee dyes, natural Latin American pigments, and found objects. Highlights of recent exhibitions include *'EmpowerHer'* London (2024); MA graduate Exhibition, Slade School of Fine Art, London (2023).

Yowshien Kuo (b. 1985, St. Louis) blends his personal experiences as a Taiwanese American with historical references and criticism to comment on social and racial inequality, cultural constructs, sexuality, and the human condition. Kuo graduated with an MFA in 2014 from Fontbonne University in St. Louis, Missouri. Most recently he was the recipient of Great Rivers Biennial Arts Award 2022-23, having a solo exhibition at The Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis. His artwork has also appeared in many publications including *New American Paintings* #149 in 2020, where he was prominently featured on the cover. Kuo has exhibited throughout the United States and Europe, including a number of art fairs. Highlights of recent exhibitions include *'When You See Me: Visibility and Contemporary Art/History'*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX (2024, group, forthcoming); *'Who is your Master?'* curated by Wolf Hill, 1969 Gallery, New York, NY (2023, group); *'More Than: Expanding Artist Identities from the American West'*, Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ (2023, group); *'Janus'*, Morgan Presents, New York, NY (2022); *'Eye Become the Beholder'*, LUCE Gallery, Turin, Italy (2022, solo); *'Sufferingly Politely'*, CAM Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, MO (2022, solo); *'Frontier Romance'*, Praise Shadows Gallery, Boston, MA (2021, solo). Yowshien is represented by LUCE Gallery in Turin, Italy.

Jack McGarrity (b. 1995, Glasgow) is an artist from the West of Scotland now living and working in London. He completed his BA at the Glasgow School of Art and a postgraduate Drawing Year course at the Royal Drawing School. Concerned with both quotidian mundanity and a heightened reality, McGarrity creates new narratives that explore notions of the absurd, stillness and alienation in the modern world. McGarrity presents collaged enactments that are, at times, familiar yet undercut by idiosyncratic and mordant notions. He is the recipient of The Sir Denis Mahon, John Kinross and the Richard Ford Award and has completed residences at the Museo del Prado, Madrid and in Florence. Highlights of recent solo exhibitions include *'Theatre as Studio, Studio as Theatre'*, Messums Org, London (2023); *'Jack McGarrity'*, Messums West, Salisbury (2021). McGarrity's work is held in the permanent collections of the National Galleries of Scotland and the British Royal Collection. McGarrity is represented by Messums London.

Kate Pincus-Whitney (b. 1993, Los Angeles) earned her MFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design. Pincus-Whitney intermingles in her art the three basic human needs: food, security, and love, something she came to envision through her upbringing in which the kitchen, as a physical and emotional space, played a very important role. In her canvases, the many symbols attached to sharing a meal and to the theatre of the dinner table are mobilised to establish a colourful and dense relationship with contemporary concerns of cultural identity. At the same time, by doing this, Pincus-Whitney places her work in a dialogue with the long tradition of representation and meaning of food in the history of art. Highlights of recent and upcoming exhibitions include *'To Live and To Dine in LA/ You Taste Like Home'*, Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles (2024, solo, forthcoming); *'The First Taste'*, Anat Ebgi (2024, group); *'Ritual Union: The Huntress'*, GNYP, Antwerp (2023, solo); *'The Gods are in The Kitchen'*, Fredericks & Freiser, New York (2022, solo); *'What Now?'*, PM/AM Gallery, London (2022, group). Kate was named a Forbes 30 under 30 young visionary in 2022. Kate is represented by Fredericks & Freiser.

Kristian Touborg (b. 1987, Denmark) has epitomised a new kind of subjectivity in painting, pairing intimacy and playfulness with art historical references and new technologies. His works are anchored in the dreamy and seductive authenticity that only materials processed by the human hand can hold. Expanding on meditations on modern image ecology, Touborg has constructed a range of two- and three-dimensional works, which defy categorisation of a specific medium, by applying a mixture of painterly gestures led by spontaneous brushstrokes of vivid oil paint in combination with the use of industrially treated materials and digitally printed surfaces. Collage techniques are then used to construct the textural fragments on the canvases. In demonstrating a profound interest in new media and technology, Touborg creates imagined archaeological items from a

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near-future society. In his practice, he takes a firm stand for the analogue in a world which is overly saturated with digital imagery. Hovering between subtle, often abstract references to the figure and detailed portrayal, the paintings give voice to a personal narrative where private components and dreamlike sensations coalesce. Recent exhibitions include *'Vibrant Escape: Ode to Summer'*, WOAW Gallery, Hong Kong (2023); NADA, The Hole, New York (2023); Market Art Fair, Stockholm (2023); Art Brussels, Newchild, Brussels (2023); *'Dandelion'*, Newchild, Antwerp (2023, solo); Art Antwerp, Newchild, Antwerp (2022); *'Fluttering The Void, Berlinskej Model'*, Prague (2022, solo); *'Trust In Mortals'*, Brigade Gallery, Copenhagen (2022); *'Light Blue Noise'*, Lundgren Gallery, Palma de Mallorca, Spain (2022, solo); KIAF Seoul, Carvalho. Touborg was the recipient of the Danish Arts Foundation working grant (2017). Kristian is represented by Newchild Gallery in Antwerp, Belgium.

Jiajia Wang (b. 1985, Beijing) received his BA Honors degree from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in 2008. Like many of his generation, Wang was eclipsed with the popularisation of television, the advent of the Internet, and the ubiquity of pop culture. Building upon the artist's breakthrough "Adventure" series from 2016, works combine digital collage, action painting and silkscreen printing in a confident, magnificent display. Wang's paintings seem to be full of abstract brushstrokes and heavy pigments, but each stroke does not lack in thinking. Unlike Western paintings, which starts from sketching then to colour, Wang's painting training began with drawing lines and imitating master's work. Expressing more of a traditional concept in a new and contemporary way is one of the core creative thinking of the artist's creation. Recent solo exhibitions include, *'Endless Summer'*, SPURS Gallery, Beijing (2023); *'A/S/L'*, DE SARTHE Gallery, Hong Kong (2023); *'A Tree Cannot Pick Up Its Root'*, TANK Shanghai, Project Space, Shanghai (2022); *'The Sun Is in My Eyes'*, Xiao Museum of Contemporary Art, Rizhao, Shandong (2021); *'Elegant, Circular, Timeless'*, SPURS Gallery, Beijing (2020); *'FOMO: Fear of missing out'*, Tao Art Space, Taipei (2020); *'Pop the Champagne'*, Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing (2018); *'Alternate Realities'*, de Sarthe Gallery, Beijing (2016). He has also participated in group exhibitions including *'Apostolic Succession'*, SPURS Gallery, Beijing, (2021); *'CLEAN'*, SPURS Gallery, Beijing (2020); *'One if by Land'*, Powerlong Art Center, Xiamen (2019).

Tianyue Zhong (b. 1994, Chengdu) lives and works between China and the US. Zhong received an MA in painting from Royal College of Art in 2020 and a BA in Fine Art from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2018. Zhong creates paintings and drawings that illustrate the uncontrollable nature of life. By using historical photographs she finds in research and shooting her own imagery, Zhong aims to capture a transformation between waiting and losing, engaged with the exuberant handling of line and paint. Fear, with its meaning in her life and her painting process, is the powerhouse for Zhong to repeatedly paint the same subject matter over time, whereas the body and shapes are incomplete and seem strangled. Highlights of recent solo exhibitions include *'Pause, Arise'* at Mou Projects, Hong Kong (2023); *'To Cut a Thread'* at Long Story Short, New York (2023). Highlights of recent group exhibitions include *'Loyal @El Royale'* presented by Loyal Gallery, Los Angeles (2024); *'Metamorfosi'* at F2T Gallery, Milan (2024); *'Nouvelle Vague'* at lbf contemporary, London (2023); *'The Consolation of Clinamen'* at Tabula Rasa, Beijing (2023); *'Sprout'* at Stems Gallery, Brussels (2023). Zhong will present a solo exhibition with lbf contemporary in March 2025.

About lbf contemporary

lbf contemporary is a contemporary gallery inspired by the dynamism of the next generation. Based in London, LBF places a special emphasis on artists with a connection to the UK – providing mentorship and support to foster the longevity of their global ecosystems. Collaboration is at the heart of the gallery's ethos and each exhibition is the result of a close partnership between LBF and the artist, curator, or fellow gallery.

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