

## Mat Collishaw

Mat Collishaw makes work that envelops the viewer in a twilight world poised between the alluring and the revolting, the familiar and the shocking, the poetic and the morbid. With a visual language that embraces diverse media, the beauty of Collishaw's work is compelling – seductive, captivating, hypnotic – yet repelling as we perceive the darker fantasies within. A repulsion triggered not by what we see, but by our innate response to it. Something between beautiful and abject.

Pornography, the crucifixion, gleaming fairies, syphilitic child prostitutes, bestiality, bondage, addiction, religion, exaltation and despair, even the final hours of a death-row inmate. There is seemingly no taboo left unbroken, no dark corner Collishaw is unwilling to explore – and yet, the work is utterly romantic, exquisitely beautiful, an expression of Collishaw's wish to "create images that are awe-inspiring". The forbidden has always fascinated Collishaw: "I am fuelled by things in my past which were suppressed or held at a distance, which have generated some form of hunger to make my work." Hardly surprising then, that themes such as stifled sexual desire, brutal and perverse lust, the power of media imagery and the concept of divinity recur throughout his oeuvre.

What is surprising, startling even, is the tenderness and ecstasy – the almost sublime – embodied within the work. "There are mechanisms within us that are primed to respond to all kinds of visual material, leaving us with no real say over what we happen to find stimulating." Collishaw is interested in imagery's effect on the subliminal, and explores this by making the vile desirable, the repulsive inviting, whilst discretely positioning himself within art-history through his reference to old masters and contemporary dialogues, as in his work *The End of Innocence* (a digital recreation of Francis Bacon's painting of Velasquez's Pope Innocent X) or his questioning of Victorian mores and ideals, executed with 21st century technology.

Collishaw's interest in the Victorians is no coincidence: 19th century Britain viewed itself in the light of scientific progress and empirical soberness. An age inhabited by educated and prosaic people. In retrospect however, child prostitution, poverty, perversion and a collective blood-lust ran parallel to what was deemed an enlightened age. Collishaw references the Victorian period by simulating its elaborately decorative, romantic style, but he indirectly conjures up that society's dark side, the corrupt underbelly so pertinent to the present day. He drags our darkest urges into the light – illustrating that humans will never overcome their baser instincts, regardless of aesthetic or scientific advancement.

Collishaw has evinced a fascination with the early Victorian machinery used to achieve illusions. Through spectral projections, pioneering modes of photography and zoetropes (which were invented early in the Victorian age as a form of pre-film animation), Collishaw's work conjures up an awe-inducing ruse. The Victoria & Albert Museum commissioned Collishaw with his largest zoetrope to date - a monumental onsite project, *Magic Lantern*, which was installed in the cupola above the entrance and appropriated the very architecture of the V&A, creating a beacon of light, complete with an attendant swarm of moths, which was visible across London during the winter months of 2010 - 2011.

The New Art Gallery Walsall hosted a major mid-career retrospective in their gallery space (2015). Comprising two floors, the survey exhibition encompassed seminal works including All Things Fall (2014) - originally commissioned for his major solo exhibition at Galleria Borghese, Rome (2014) - a zoetrope comprising over 300 individual animated figures; bringing to life the biblical tale of genocide; The Massacre of the Innocents. This particular work was described by critic Waldemar Januszczak as 'nothing less than a contemporary masterpiece' as the optical illusion engages and seduces the viewer before they fully realise they are complicit in a scene of genocide.

In 2016, The National Trust co-commissioned Collishaw to produce two works in response to the follies in Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal Water Garden - a National Trust World Heritage Site in Yorkshire. Both works draw upon the history of the buildings and are once more, Collishaw presents optical illusions that echo ghosts of the past. The first work, Seria Ludo, is a glowing, strobe lit chandelier, covered with 186 carousing Lilliputian figures. As it spins, the zoetrope animates the tableaux, bringing scenes of drunken revelry to life as characters eat, drink, fight and dance. In contrast, the Temple of Piety - serenely stationed at the edge of the garden's Moon Ponds, was the setting for a more tranquil work; The Pineal Eye sees two parabolic mirrors face each other. The resulting optical effect creates an ethereal mirage of the Roman depiction of piety, the Grecian daughter feeding her imprisoned father from her breast, which also appeared as a relief on the back wall of the Temple.

Collishaw is both a deep thinker and an artist with a conscience. 'I was brought up to be deeply moral,' he says. 'That's what my parents impressed on me. So it's important for me that my work has some kind of moral content even if it's just nudging people, saying, "What about this?"' Collishaw's forthcoming exhibition at Blain|Southern presents works which play with illusion, Albion, is a ghost-like apparition generated by laser scanning and projected using the Victorian's 'Pepper's Ghost' technique. The subject the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest, Nottingham, the ancient tree said to have sheltered Robin Hood and is now supported by steel structures and kept alive beyond its natural life, because the myth has become seemingly more important than the tree itself, a metaphor for the whole Brexit-driven idea of the UK. Twelve tromp l'oeil paintings are a contemporary nod to Carel Fabritius's 1654 masterpiece The Goldfinch and when Collishaw's zoetrope The Centrifugal Soul whirrs into action, we are presented with a simulacrum of courtship, it's a peculiar irony that Collishaw's work has brilliantly revealed for many years: looking at art is fun and intoxicating because it teaches us that visual pleasure is an elaborate illusion to keep our species alive.

Collishaw's work has been exhibited in numerous solo shows around the world, including: Thresholds, Somerset House, London; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, UK; Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire, UK (2017); The Centrifugal Soul, Blain|Southern London (2017); folly! Fountains Relief, Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal, North Yorkshire (2016); Mat Collishaw, New Art Gallery Walsall, (2015); In Camera, Library of Birmingham, Birmingham (2015); Black Mirror, Galleria Borghese, Rome (2014); Mat Collishaw: The Yielding Glass, An Gailearaí, Ghaioth Dobhair, Londonderry (2014); Mat Collishaw: Afterimage, Arter, Istanbul (2013); Mat Collishaw: Preternatural, FaMa Gallery, Verona (2013); La vie de château, Les Châteaux de la Drôme, Ladrome (2013); Mat Collishaw, Pino Pascali Museum Foundation, Bari (2013); Mat Collishaw, Bass Museum of Art, Florida (2013); THIS IS NOT AN EXIT, Blain|Southern, London (2013); Crystal Gaze, Raucci/Santamaria Gallery, Naples (2012); Vitacide, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2012); Creation Condemned at Blain|Southern London (2010); Retrospectre, BFI Southbank, London (2010); Hysteria, Freud Museum, London (2009); Shooting Stars, Haunch of Venison, London (2008); Museum of Contemporary Art, Warsaw

(2000); Galeria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, Italy (1999); Life/Live, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville, Paris and The Brooklyn Museum, New York (1998); Duty Free Spirits, Lisson Gallery, London (1997) and Camden Arts Centre, London (1996).

Recent group exhibitions include: A Weed in a Plant out of Place, Lismore Castle Arts, Ireland (2016); SerpentiForm, Museo di Roma, Rome (2016); Na wspan (ciała i ogrody, 9th Biennale of Photography, Arsenal Municipal Gallery, Poznań (2015); SUBSTANCE, Timothy Taylor, London (2015); L'inconscient pictòric (the pictorial unconscious), MNAC, Barcelona (2015); In Search of the Miraculous, Newlyn Art Gallery (2015); SNAP Art at the Aldeburgh Festival, Aldeburgh Music, Aldeburgh (2015); Nature Morte, Contemporary artists reinvigorate the Still-Life tradition, Hå gamle prestegard (2015); Gallery of Wonder, Northumberland; Woodhorn; Powburn; Spittal; Falstone; Alwinton; Newcastle (2015); Glasstress 2015 Gotika, Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti, Palazzo Franchetti, Venice (2015); NGORONGORO – Artist Weekend, Studiobuildings, Lehderstrasse, Berlin-Weissensee (2015); "The time ... and there was time", from Helga de Alvear ' Collection, Fundación Helga de Alvear, Cáceres (2015); How to Construct a Time Machine, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes (2015); The Omnivore's Dilemma: Visualized, University of Connecticut Contemporary Art Galleries, Mansfield (2015); SMAC Art Gallery, curated by Keith Coventry and Helen A Pritchard, Cape Town (2014); Stations of the Cross, St Marylebone Church, London (2014); Vanitas: Fashion and Art, Bass Museum of Art, Florida (2014); Corporeality and Sexuality, Votive Church, Vienna (2014); The Bigger Picture: Works from the 1990s, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2014); Out Of Our Heads, Shoreditch Town Hall, London (2014); Diacore presents Ron Arad's Last Train, Ron Arad Studio, London (2014); Today's Specials Brought to you by Pace London & Abdullah Al Turki, Pace Gallery, London (2014); Deloitte Ignite 2014 -Myth – The Feather and the Flame, Royal Opera House, London (2014).

Collishaw's work can be found in public collections globally, including; Arter Foundation, Istanbul; British Council Collection, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Torino; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum of Old and New Art, New South Wales; Olbricht Collection, Berlin and Tate, London.

Blain|Southern, Other Criteria and Thames & Hudson have published books with Collishaw's work and he won XVI edition of the Pino Pascali Prize in July 2013.

The artist lives and works in London.