

Mark Fairington *The Landscape Room*

3 December – 20 February 2021
Wednesday - Friday 12:00 - 18:00
Saturday 10:00 - 13:00 by appointment

Handel Street Projects is pleased to present a series of new paintings by Mark Fairington. Landscape, the natural world and our relationship to it are now at the heart of some of the most critical thinking for our future. Could this be a new space for liberty and experimentation? Could other forms of existence, beyond the current organisation of the city and countryside lives, be imagined?

The Landscape Room will feature a new series of paintings by Mark Fairington that are poised between the observed and the remembered, functioning in the gap between what we see and what we know. Fairington's new paintings began as a commission in 2018 for Cherryburn, the birthplace of the artist Thomas Bewick, reflecting the landscape and its history. The works connected with the historic context of Cherryburn to evoke a sense of local identity and cultural continuity. They examined how a subjective response to the landscape can be framed within a collective experience, shaped by our knowledge of the history of landscape painting. *The Landscape Room* will be designed to show the paintings as a single installation, echoing the way they were exhibited at Cherryburn. They were made to look as if they were meant to be there, as if they were always meant to be there.

The paintings explore how our contemporary perception of the landscape is framed by our experience of historical images of the Landscape. There was a moment in the early 19th century when paintings began to reflect a dramatic shift in the relationship between humans and the landscape. Human activity through the industrial revolution had transformed the cities in England and its effects on the people and the landscape were being seen across the country. Artists such as John Constable in England and the Barbizon school of painters in France wanted to create a new form of painting, a radical language that articulated a profound change in our understanding of the natural world and our relationship to it. This heralded a new approach to realism with the artists working from direct experience of the natural world without paying homage to historical European models. This was nature unleashed from the idea that it could be cultivated and manipulated in order to conform to classical rules, nature defying the idea that humans could dominate it.

The paintings in *The Landscape Room* are based upon multiple photographs taken on walks through the countryside, recording different moments in time. These images are combined in the paintings where an obsessive description of surfaces fills the picture plane, the brushwork generating a restless anxiety; nature in motion, unfixed and ungraspable. *The Landscape Room* paintings frames this visual energy within the architecture of a Georgian living room.

Mark Fairington is Professor in Painting at the University of the Arts London and much of his work has resulted from research projects with museum collections, sustaining a visual examination of the idea and image of the specimen. Past projects have been with the Imperial War Museum, Oxford Museum of Natural History, the Natural History Museum, the Horniman Museum and the Wellcome Collection.

In 2002 the Wellcome Trust funded a field trip to Belize, with the biologist Dr George McGavin from Oxford University, to study the use of mimetic camouflage by insects called treehoppers. In 2004 an exhibition of Mark's work, *Fabulous Beasts*, was mounted at the Natural History Museum. *Unnatural History*, 2012, was a retrospective at the Mannheim Kunstverein, Germany. His recent solo exhibitions were *Collected and Possessed*, at the Horniman Museum in London in 2016 and *The Worm in The Bud* at Handel Street Projects in 2017. *Walking Looking and Telling Tales* at Cherryburn, 2018 was commissioned as part of the 'Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience' research project.