

HOST

Recent Paintings by MARK SHIELDS

14 February – 7 March 2014

Press Release

Grosvenor Gallery and **Browse & Darby** are pleased to announce the opening of **Host**, an important solo exhibition of **99** paintings by **Mark Shields**. The preview is on **Thursday 13th February** and will be held across two London venues – **Grosvenor Gallery in St James's and Browse & Darby on Cork Street**.

These recent paintings, painted on muslin and measuring roughly 5ft by 2ft each, are primitive and earthy depictions of solitary figures engaged in apparently commonplace activities but which suggest deeper divine or magical significance. Primal and moving, they are the artist's attempt at a "Frieze of Life".

Although there are 99 separate figures, they have been conceived in pairs and are unified by a kind of wounded hopefulness. They seem at once a troupe of travelling players, a human calendar of days and seasons marked out from the normal flow of history and a visionary attempt to transform the bare conditions of existence.

They resist an easy narrative, their constrained poses suggesting what Walter Benjamin referred to as the *gestus*, where the gesture is an event - a drama in itself. The 'deformity' of these figures connects with the notion of depiction in medieval and even pre-historic cultures, in which visual forms stay close enough to the human appearance for us to readily identify with them but are distorted in such a way as to suggest the representation of something 'other', either demonic or divine.

While Shields' style and treatment continue to evolve, his artistic creed has remained unaltered, a desire to penetrate to the heart of the problem of existence and in so doing uncover something of the Divine signature which he believes lies hidden in the matrix of our visible world. He has spoken of painting as "*a kind of inadequate decipherment of a language which has become virtually extinct.*" He also remains strongly convinced of the unique possibilities of paint to 'alchemically' transpose the world around us.

A NOTE ON THE ORIGIN OF THE SERIES

In early 2012 I had been combining collage and paint and ended up sticking patches of muslin over the paintings to allow quick changes to be made. The texture reminded me of the painted linen shrouds from Egypt, and I decided to work directly onto roughly cut muslin fragments with diluted oil paint.

The ghosts and traces of disintegrating, overlaid images made me think of the image as a residue of an almost ritual act rather than as the result of mere picture-making (like the so-called 'image not made with hands'). This and perhaps associations with the Turin shroud and embroidered Byzantine altar-cloths led to the painting of full scale figures on narrow sections of cloth. It seemed natural that there should be a large number of these and that the number should be incomplete to evoke a perpetual search.

I worked on the images in pairs, overlaying one on the other and alternating this as I worked, resulting in two versions of the same idea or experience, so to speak, sometimes contradictory, sometimes complimentary.

For me they seemed to document moments of doubt, anxiety, revelation, gratitude and so on. A primitive and emblematic 'Host' of witnesses having their origins in real life, but interlaced with literary, cultural and

historical references of personal resonance. I thought of them almost as icons acting as go-betweens or entry points to invisible realities.

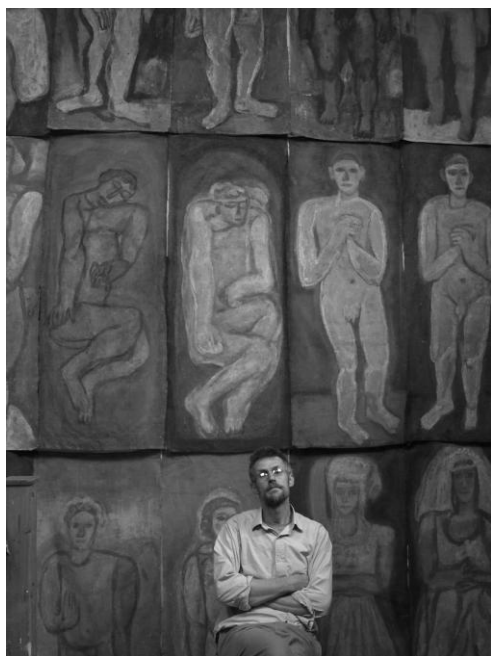
Mark Shields, November 2013

With shows in London, Florence, Berlin, Hong Kong, South Africa and Art Basel there is growing demand for Shields' work. He is featured in leading private collections in the UK and Internationally and is in the permanent collection of several museums including the National Gallery of Ireland, the Arts Council for Northern Ireland, the Ulster Museum, and the National Self-Portrait Collection of Ireland.

Mark Shields was educated at the University of Ulster. He lives and works near Belfast.

Exhibitions:

- 2011 The Broken and Scattered God, Dickon Hall Fine Art
- 2010 Never And Always, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town,
- 2010 Here and Elsewhere, 2008, Colloquy, Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2007 Twilight and the Unseen, Galerie Brusberg, Berlin
- 2005 Paintings and Drawings, Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2003 Pilgrimage, Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2001 Inhabitants of the Dream Courtyard, Grosvenor Gallery, London



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www.facebook.com/GrosvenorGallery, twitter.com/grosvenorart

Gallery Hours:

Mon - Fri 9:30am - 5:30pm
Saturdays during exhibitions 11 - 2pm
Sundays Closed

Browse & Darby

19 Cork Street, London, W1S 3LP, T: +44 (0) 20 7734 7984, E : art@browseanddarby.co.uk W : www.browseanddarby.co.uk,

Gallery Hours:

Mon - Fri 10am - 5.30pm
Saturdays during exhibitions 11 - 2pm
Sundays Closed