

Ann-Marie James: *L'Origine du monde*

22 June – 28 July 2023



Image: Ann-Marie James, *L'Origine du monde 4*, 2023.
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Richard Saltoun Gallery is delighted to present a new body of work by the former British School at Rome residence artist Ann-Marie James. James takes as her inspiration *L'Origine du monde* (1866), the infamous scandalous painting by Gustave Courbet, together with works from three series of paintings: *Musée Imaginaire*, *Rome* and *Forum*.

Commissioned by an Ottoman diplomat, *L'Origine du Monde* was the first time that female genitalia had been depicted in such a blatant fashion, deployed in any religious or mythological context. James takes this iconic painting and abstracts it to such an extent, that she renders it unidentifiable, unravelling the relationship between the male artist and his muse.

James's artistic production uniquely explores two main themes: one is the idea of change, of metamorphoses; the other is a connection, or dialogue, with art history via the use of found imagery and texts. A cultural conversation that stretches right back to ancient Greek and Roman myths. She is interested in using the found material to investigate her own responses to individual historical works, to the artists that made them, and to their themes and origins.

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To create her paintings, she employs a unique, process-based method that involves the layering of materials and techniques. Starting with a pencil or ink drawing inspired by an historic artwork, she produces a screenprint, the initial element of the painting, that she prints many times, gradually adding new layers of drawing and painting. Through this process of repetition, the figurative element of the original artwork is lost and transformed into a complex abstract composition.

Ann-Marie James cites the famed British Op artist Bridget Riley as a sort of inspiration. Like Riley, James went from painting in black and white to using colour. To create the works on view in the exhibition, the artist mixed various acrylic colours with a particular mixing medium that leaves a polished finish. Due to the long drying times and the many layers of prints and colours required to complete a painting, each work takes several months of meticulous and continuous effort.

Ann-Marie James' work is intimately tied to Rome. In 2013, she was awarded the Derek Hill Foundation Scholarship at the British School at Rome. During this period she started an ongoing series of works, titled *Musée Imaginaire*, made directly onto the pages of a first edition of Andre Malraux's seminal eponymous publication from 1952. In 1961 Malraux appointed the painter Balthus as director of Villa Medici in Rome, and together they profoundly reformed the Academy. Malraux's book brings together imagery of art and antiquities from all over the world into one tome, calling into question the "home" of art and the role of museums, as well as representation and reproduction in art history. For Ann-Marie James, this magnificent tome is prescient of the way in which art is viewed via the internet.

Rome series are an evolution of the body of work that Ann-Marie James started while she was in residence at the British School in Rome. She decided to focus on something that she seemed to see everywhere in Rome: the depiction of draped cloth and clothing rendered in marble sculpture, aimed by the intention of starting with a representative drawing of something that was already an abstraction of a figurative form.

The works in the *Forum* series were created in response to an engraving of the Forum in the collection of Macquarie University in Sydney, where the artist participated in the narrative group exhibition '*Inside and Beyond the Roman Forum: Julia Davis, Ann-Marie James, Pollyxenia Joannou and Lisa Jones*' in 2017, after being awarded with the Artists International Development Fund Award from Arts Council, England. This evocative interdisciplinary show aimed to recreate the rich ambience and atmosphere of the Roman Forum, tracing its history through contemporary art's responses to ancient artefacts and historic engraved prints.

Press contacts:
Bianca Lorusso Caputi
bianca@richardsaltoun.com

Images: © Ann-Marie James
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Gallery, London and Rome

Richard Saltoun Gallery
Via Margutta 48a-48b
00187 Roma
www.richardsaltoun.com
rome@richardsaltoun.com
+39 06 86678 388

Opening hours:
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Notes to editors:

Ann-Marie JAMES (b. 1981) was born in Buckinghamshire, UK and currently lives and works in Suffolk. James studied MA Fine Art at Wimbledon College of Art, London (2010–12), received her Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design, London (2010), and a BA (Hons) Fine Art from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London (2001–04).

Awards include the Artists International Development Fund travel award, Arts Council England (2016); The Derek Hill Foundation Scholarship at The British School at Rome (2013–2014); MFI Flat Time House Graduate Award, supported by the John Latham Foundation, London (2012); The Jealous Graduate Print Prize, London (2012) and The Queen's Award, Central Saint Martins Scholarship Awards (2003). Her work is featured in the collections of The British Museum, the Chelsea College of Art and Design Library, the University of the Arts, London, the Victoria and Albert Museum and The Ned.