

THE ARTIST ROOM

WILLIAM BRICKEL: FAR FROM ANYTHING

5 May – 28 May 2022

Opening times: Wednesday–Friday, 11am–6pm and Saturday, 12–4pm

The forlorn figures in William Brickel's paintings brood in claustrophobic contortions. Their inner lives seem to be as convoluted as their poses, as ambivalent as their mien.

Tyler Malone, *Artforum*, 2020

The Artist Room is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by William Brickel (b.1994).

Brickel's new works continue his uniquely sensitive and eloquent explorations of the human figure. *Far From Anything* includes paintings, charcoal drawings and watercolours that continue his ongoing intention to uncover how the passage of time re-shapes how we understand history. This exhibition follows the artist's first institutional solo exhibition, *I'd Tell You If I Could*, at San Luis Obispo Museum of Art, California in 2021.

In Brickel's world, figures are situated in captivating poses, elegantly staged in moments of intimacy, longing, reflection and ennui. Drawing from both biographical and imagined narratives, Brickel's interior scenes, such as *The Landing* (2022), are rooted in the artist's physical experience. 'I paint from my imagination, and the closest thing I can get to something physical, if I'm stuck, is myself,' he once noted. 'I look in the mirror... and paint from the feel.'

Play and manipulation with bodily proportion is a key characteristic of Brickel's language. Figures often appear contorted and in varying states of embrace, connection and disconnection. In *A Heavy Feeling* (2022), arms and legs appear lengthened; filling the frame in a way that suggests they may fall out and into the viewer's world. Placement of hands and feet – what they touch, how they feel – is carefully choreographed; with Brickel once describing their intrinsic capacity to 'evoke empathy.'

There is a conscious ambiguity to be found in works such as *A Looming Sadness* (2021–22): of time in the ambiguous clothing, and of place in the ambiguous furniture and interior backgrounds. The 'flat realism' present in the charcoal drawings, paintings and watercolours – in colour, form and style – has been placed in a lineage of interwar artists such as Stanley Spencer,

Austin Osman Spare, Winifred Knights and Edward Burra, whose works also sought to break with accurate geometric perspective in order to divert a viewer's attention.

This exhibition also includes a smaller oil painting on board (*Stranger #4, 2022*) from Brickel's recent *Stranger* series. In these works, which focus on the face, shy and withdrawn figures appear to be hiding, voyeuristically gazing at mysterious events occurring beyond the confines of the painting. Brickel describes how these characters can be understood to be in 'a purposely shut off play; you never quite know the plot and you never quite know the people.'

Both meditative and psychologically charged, Brickel's works included in *Far From Anything* are evidence of how portraiture can be used to render the universality of human experience. From alienation and isolation to kinship and desire, his tender compositions explore how by investigating our own histories – we can learn more about one another. 'It's up to the viewer to project and to pick apart,' he observes, describing his recent works. 'The line that I want to tread is always to encourage viewers to weave their own narrative onto what these people are doing and who they are, and to reflect oneself to them. Yet they remain wholly personal.'

ABOUT WILLIAM BRICKEL:

William Brickel (b.1994) lives and works in Gloucestershire, UK. In 2018, Brickel graduated with an MA from London's Royal Drawing School. Prior to that, Brickel completed a BA in Photography at Camberwell College of Art, London. Residencies include Palazzo Monti Artist Residency, Brescia, Italy (2019); and Borgo Pingnano, Pisa, Italy (2018).

Recent solo exhibitions include *I'd Tell You If I Could*, San Luis Obispo Museum of Art, California, USA (2021–22); *I'd Tell You If I Could*, Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, California, USA (2021); and *Countrymen*, ltd, Los Angeles, California, USA (2020). Recent group exhibitions include *Love is the Devil: Studies after Francis Bacon*, Marlborough, London, UK (2022); and *IRL (In Real Life)*, Timothy Taylor, London, UK (2021).

Brickel's work resides in prominent institutional collections including Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, USA; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, California, USA; The Prince of Wales, Royal Collection Trust, London, UK; and X Museum, Beijing, China.

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