



Tjebbe Beekman | *The Transformation*, 2023

GRIMM is pleased to present *Drift*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Dutch artist Tjebbe Beekman (b. 1972, Leiden, NL) on view at the gallery's London location from 11 January to 24 February, 2024. This is the artist's fourth solo exhibition with GRIMM and his first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom.

On view in *Drift* is a body of work exploring the artist's interest in painting as a philosophical process, a vehicle for reflecting on society and human power dynamics within it. For Beekman paint functions like language, able to give form to thoughts and feelings through pictorial logic, though avoiding a didactic approach in favour of imagery that remains open to interpretation. Building on the past two decades of his work, Beekman has taken a more intuitive approach in his latest canvases, focusing on the unfolding process of painting itself in order to realise meaning, rather than searching for direct narrative or metaphor in advance. As such, the result has been to hone in on a particular intensity, drama or kind of apotheosis in painting, a charged or elevated moment.

Composed over the course of several months, each work is made up of multiple visual and textural cues. Thick swathes of acrylic and emulsion, often combined with grit or sand, are heavily applied to each surface, giving sculptural weight to his figures, landscapes and interiors.

Replete with art historical allusions, Beekman compounds imagery culled from various generations of his peers and artistic progenitors, paying homage to the wide-ranging traditions of his medium. Particularly inspired by a recent trip to Rome, the canon of the Roman Renaissance leaves traces in the recent work of Beekman, in both thematic and compositional devices. One can recognise in his paintings an interest in the construction of power or divinity, yet at the same time witness the deconstruction of religious painting into constituent motifs, as figures, gestures, scenery and clothing is cropped, appropriated and synthesised in a quasi-cubist rearrangement of space. The effect of this is deliberately disorienting, with legible storylines supplanted by fragmentation as a reflection of the human condition and existential uncertainty, an uncanny feeling of being adrift within familiar environments. Set against the backdrop of increasing political and societal tension, one can sense in Beekman's recent works a particular poignancy.

Spanning parallel walls of the gallery are two paintings with panoramic dimensions, *Drift I* and *Drift II*. Each combines a range of techniques simultaneously recalling Mannerism, Futurism and Abstract Expressionism as overlapping geometric planes intersect with gestural abstraction and measured figuration.

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Gesticulating bodies coalesce in a flurry, bringing to mind conflict or protest, with figures rising and falling, and outstretched limbs grasping for one another. In two smaller canvases, Beekman explores the time honoured genre of still life painting, combining the careful study of rotting fruit with an anonymous figure's hand pointing into the scene, a reference to Doubting Thomas. In doing so he combines historical motifs to produce a contemporary reflection on decay, scepticism and transience.

The exhibition's central triptych *The Transformation* makes use of the three-panel format most often associated with religious altarpieces, however, in Beekman's case the influence of Max Beckmann and Francis Bacon is equally pronounced.



Tjebbe Beekman in his studio, Amsterdam (NL), 2023 | Photo: Jonathan de Waart

In this work, as in his panoramas, there is an emphasis on striking body language, with outstretched fists signifying power, violence and dynamism. The pose of the figure, shrouded and doubled over, however, undermines any single symbolic reading, as it simultaneously recalls the crucifixion and may just as reasonably stand in for suffering or sacrifice. This pursuit of painting's pliable communicative ability is at the core of Beekman's recent works, finding imagery that eludes direct narrative or moralising and instead engenders dichotomies that create space for reflection and even catharsis. Across all of the paintings in *Drift*, Beekman deploys the received wisdom of centuries of art and visual culture to explore timeless human emotions and stories; struggles between the powerful and powerless, between order and chaos, glory and shame, triumph and doubt.

#### About the artist

Tjebbe Beekman (b. 1972 in Leiden, NL) lives and works in Amsterdam (NL). He attended the KABK: Royal Academy of Art in The Hague (NL) from 1993 to 1997, followed by the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam (NL) from 2003 to 2004. Awards and nominations include the Theo Wolvecamp Prize (NL), Buning Brongers Prize (NL), and the Royal Painting Prize (NL).

Beekman's recent exhibitions include: *Tetris*, GRIMM, New York, NY (US); *Symbiosis: Virtues*, GRIMM, Amsterdam (NL); *Reflections beyond the Surface*, AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam (NL) and *Symbiosis*, GRIMM, New York, NY (US). Beekman's work can be found in various public, private and institutional collections including Aedes Art Collection, Amsterdam (NL); ABN Amro Art Collection, Amsterdam (NL); AkzoNobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam (NL); De Nederlandsche Bank, Amsterdam (NL); Collection De Heus-Zomer, Barneveld (NL); The Hort Family Collection, New York, NY (US); ING Art Collection, Amsterdam (NL); Kunstmuseum, The Hague (NL); Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar (NL); Sanders Collection (NL); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (NL); Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam (NL); Straus Family Collection, Peerskill, NY (US).

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