

FLOWERS GALLERY

PETER HOWSON

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Private View: 16 January 2025

Flowers Gallery Hong Kong is pleased to present an exhibition of works by renowned Scottish painter Peter Howson.

Considered one of his generation's leading figurative painters, Peter Howson was a focal member of a group of young artists to emerge from the Glasgow School of Art in the 1980s, known as the 'New Glasgow Boys.' Howson is renowned for his penetrating insight into the human condition, and his heroic portrayals of the mighty and meek. His art is described by Robert Heller as "founded in humanity, especially the human face."



Peter Howson, *Luxuria*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 182.5 x 244 cm

Following Howson's critically-acclaimed 2023 retrospective *When the Apple Ripens: Peter Howson at 65* at Edinburgh City Art Centre, Flowers Gallery Hong Kong will exhibit two major paintings, *Luxuria* (2018) and *The Banner of Saint George* (2015) on which the theme of the show is based, alongside a series of drawings on paper from 2023 - 2024.

Luxuria (2018) visualises a densely populated world in decline, depicting figures engaged in a struggle for survival. Howson constructs a compelling narrative that delves into themes of conflict, destruction, human suffering, and redemption. Often drawing on Latin phrases for the titles of his artworks and exhibitions, *Luxuria* translates to a state characterised by excess and extravagance.

Through the interplay of the title and the painting's imagery, Howson critiques the repercussions of a life driven solely by desire and passion, ultimately portraying a self-indulgent society in decline. This painting was a highlight of Howson's 2018 solo exhibition *Acta Est Fabula* at Flowers Gallery, which marked the 25th anniversary of his first visit to Bosnia in 1993, where he served as Britain's official war artist documenting the Bosnian War. This period significantly influenced Howson's artistic practice, as it coincided with the growing prominence of right-wing politics in the United Kingdom.

The apocalyptic element in *Luxuria* (2018) was influenced by the experiences surrounding Brexit and the resultant surge in populism following the referendum. Drawing inspiration from the politically and socially charged works of German artists Otto Dix (1891-1969) and Max Beckmann (1884-1950), Howson offers a poignant portrayal of the far-right threat, serving as a cautionary reflection for humanity.



Peter Howson, *The Banner of St George*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 183 x 244 cm

The Banner of St. George (2015) illustrates a tumultuous scene characterised by chaotic interactions, symbolising the disintegration of social order into violent struggles for dominance. This unsettling portrayal of a dystopian future emerges from a global crisis. The title alludes to St. George, the patron saint of England and Georgia, who is revered as one of the fourteen auxiliary saints. He has come to represent the culture, values, beliefs, and identity of the English people. St. George, an early Christian martyr, epitomised martial valor and selflessness during the Middle Ages. His significance as a religious emblem has been prominent throughout English history, particularly established during the Tudor period, owing to his popularity during the Crusades and the Hundred Years' War. The English flag, which features a red cross on a white background, derives from St. George's emblem and is prominently displayed above the tumult in the composition.

In 2015, Peter Howson's work examined the political and social challenges leading up to the UK General Election. This period was marked by large-scale and intense compositions filled with chaotic arrangements of figures that convey a sense of barbarism. The depiction of disorder, violence, and the collapse of societal norms was a reflection of the growing influence and popularity of radical political movements worldwide.

The portrayal of the distorted figures pays homage to Dutch masters Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel the Elder. The composition is replete with themes of violence, suffering, and confusion as the figures strive to navigate an unfamiliar and fear-laden world.

Artist Biography

Peter Howson is one of the UK's leading contemporary figurative painters. Born in London in 1958, at age four he moved with his family to Ayrshire. He studied at Glasgow School of Art from 1975-1977, returning in 1979 to complete a master's degree. He lives and works in Glasgow.

Emerging from Glasgow School of Art in the 1980s, Howson quickly proved his skill of capturing the maverick, the excessive, the non-conformist, and his own personal understanding of the struggles of everyday life, with an ability to engage with individuals on the peripheries of society. He was a focal member of the group of young artists to emerge from the Glasgow School of Art during the 1980s dubbed the 'New Glasgow Boys'. In 1985, he was made the Artist in Residence at the University of St Andrews whilst working as a part-time tutor at Glasgow School of Art.

In 1992 he was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum to record the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Howson was appointed official British war artist for Bosnia in 1993, where he witnessed the harrowing realities of war, culminating in a solo exhibition at the IWM London in 1994.

Howson is the recipient of numerous awards, including The Henry Moore Foundation Prize in 1998 and the Lord Provost's medal, Glasgow, in 1995. In 1996 he was made Doctor of Letters, Honoras Causa, by the University of Strathclyde. He was awarded an OBE in 2009. In 2011 Howson completed a dramatic rendering of the martyrdom of St John Ogilvie for the renovated St Andrew's Cathedral in Glasgow. The two-year process of working on the commission was the subject of a BBC documentary.

Howson has exhibited throughout the UK and internationally, and in 2023 had a major retrospective at the Edinburgh City Art Centre. His works are represented in public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate, London; the Imperial War Museum, London; British Museum, London; National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; Edinburgh City Art Centre; Glasgow Museums; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and National Gallery of Norway, Oslo.

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