

PRESS RELEASE

Sholto Blissett

Life in Deep Time

5 December 2024 - 8 February 2025

Something needs to be said to describe my moonlight.

Almost frost but softer, almost ash but wholer.

Made almost of water, which has strictly speaking

No feature, but a kind of counter-light, call it insight.

– Alice Oswald, *Full Moon*, 2007

Life In Deep Time is the second solo exhibition by Sholto Blissett at Hannah Barry Gallery. An ambitious presentation of eleven new paintings, the exhibition marks a significant shift in the visual language and emotional tone of Blissett's work as he turns his eye to a series of large-scale nocturnal and subterranean scenes. Continuing his exploration of the aesthetics of 'Nature' and how our contemporary moment challenges the ways in which we have historically chosen to understand our place in society and in the natural world, *Life in Deep Time* pushes Blissett's work toward a new mystical dimension, drawing equally from prehistory to the unfathomable reach of the future. From the cool expanse of mountainous valleys to the immensity of tenebrous cave systems, illuminated by contrasting lustres of fire, ice and moonlight, together Blissett's work explores the tenderness between natural architecture, ecological thought, human fantasy and celestial forms of light and visibility.

Throughout *Life in Deep Time*, we see a transition away from the classical paradigm and centralised subject of human architecture, whether serenely fortified or on the brink of natural catastrophe, as seen in Blissett's previous bodies of work, *Rubicon*, *Ship of Fools* and *Garden of Hubris*. Palazzo architectures, cold travertine walls and blank municipal facades – visual shorthands for Western power – are here diminished, or rather transformed into an obscure and animistic entanglement between man-made and geological forms: the carved stone of a rotunda blending into a great helix of desiccated fissures in a cavernous wall; a night time silhouette of ancient columns confounded into the unworldly mirage of a surrounding forest. Coupled with the depth and magnitude of geological architecture, or the nocturnal light borrowed from our celestial neighbours, Blissett calls attention to our manufactured and shifting relationship between social constructions of 'nature' and 'culture' – their cosmically entwined, spectral and thorny coexistence.

Blissett's paintings, achieved through layers of oil undertones and detailed in a meticulous mosaic of architectural, oceanic and topographical forms, deploy a commanding centralised viewpoint. Uncommon for classical perspective painting, this approach establishes a direct and dynamic relationship that emphasises the will to order and control, but also speaks to the solipsistic and romantic conception of an individualised subject at the centre of all experience. Used historically as means to illustrate the power of God in nature, imaginary painted landscapes, such as those of the Dutch Golden Age or the sublime allegories of German Romanticist Caspar David Friedrich, have traditionally used this technique to fold cultural constructions of 'wilderness' into a fetishised view of nature *out there*, exterior and separate from the human – aesthetic counterparts to modern science's use of taxonomies,

mountaineering, museum collections and the ‘self’ in contrast to the ‘other’ as tools to delimit the boundaries between nature and culture.

Life in Deep Time speaks to this tradition of painting – its reverence for the natural world, its often-mystical undertones and the sheer pleasure of physical sensation: fresh air, daylight, wind, moisture, cold and warmth – all the while subtly calling to attention its inherited perspectives. For Blissett, it is the purifying dualism this discourse offers that is questioned and subverted through his uncanny, dreamlike visions – with increasing metaphysical force. Exploring surreal natural landscapes with a near-sculptural use of negative space, coloured and brought to life through oscillating feelings of magnitude and irreverence, desire, memory, order and collapse, Blissett demonstrates that the separation of nature and culture is no longer – nor has it even been – tenable, illustrating that the more we attempt to separate these two spheres, the more we realise how inseparably entwined they really are.

***Life in Deep Time* Book Launch
Saturday 25 January 2025, 2-4pm
with Foolscap Editions**

In collaboration with London-based independent publisher Foolscap Editions, we are pleased to present a specially made short run publication centred on Blissett’s exhibition, *Life in Deep Time*. The publication features a commissioned essay by Director of Dulwich Picture Gallery, Jennifer Scott, ‘The Invisible, Visible Other-World of Sholto Blissett’, selected poems by British poet Alice Oswald, as well as an interview between Blissett and curator Charlie Mills.

SHOLTO BLISSETT

b. 1996, Salisbury, UK. Lives and works in London, UK.

Sholto Blissett presented his first solo exhibition, *Ship of Fools*, at Hannah Barry Gallery in 2022. Later that year he participated in Colnaghi New Masters in London, presenting large-scale work alongside two masterpieces by French romanticist Hubert Robert. Blissett has since exhibited his work internationally with solo exhibitions at Hannah Barry Gallery, London, UK (2024); Peres Projects, Milan, IT (2023); and Alexander Berggruen, New York, US (2023). Recent group exhibitions include Cob Gallery, London, UK (2024); Hauser & Wirth, Somerset, UK (2024); Nassima-Landau Foundation, Tel Aviv, IR (2023); The Hole, New York, US (2022); L.U.P.O, Milan, IT (2021); Nicola Vassell, New York, US (2021); and White Cube, London, UK (2020). Blissett holds a Masters in Painting from the Royal College of Art, London (2020) and a Bachelors in Geography from Durham University (2017). His work is held in the collections of X Museum, CN.