

Henry Curchod

Trouble on the Event Horizon

30 March, 2023 – 13 May, 2023
First Floor & Lower Ground Floor

MAMOTH is pleased to announce 'Trouble on the Event Horizon', the gallery's second solo exhibition of Henry Curchod, on view from 30th March to 13th May 2023.

Figures in Henry Curchod's paintings are almost never alone. Men are locked in a wrestling match, people stamp on strangers, police throw suspects to the ground, parents break down in front of their children, heads lie severed from their bodies. Seen fighting, being bullied, going mad, fleeing from violence or lying limp after an attack, tension erupts that is at times physical, psychological and emotional – or all three at once. In the artist's latest exhibition, many of these figures seem to reappear across different works. The title, Trouble on the Event Horizon, makes a metaphorical reference to a notion in physics to suggest moments and ideas on the cusp of change, akin to the heightened, looping stories of the works themselves.

Curchod collects these moments from daily life in a notebook, drawing events after they have occurred and begin to recede to memory. A culmination of duration and experience, the paintings are sketched lightly with oil stick, followed by turpentine-dipped brushes that are pushed into the gestural marks, with final charcoal lines bringing greater clarity to the figures. Careful preparation of the surface ensures the paintings absorb light to further emphasise their tactical quality and non-screen origins. Together, this process and these material choices maintain something of the intimacy of an impromptu drawing. His depictions of the quotidian become exaggerated with time, moving further and further away from a realist or photographic visual register. The resulting images are either weird or wild. The scenes are equal parts ambiguous, anxious and dreamlike.

Influenced by his Western upbringing and Iranian heritage, Curchod's work resists direct autobiographical readings. Amid a wider return to figurative painting by a younger generation of artists, some of the most interesting contributions have pushed against the limits of what it is possible to represent, while also questioning what representation itself achieves. For Curchod, his entry into this discourse is deliberate and distinctive. An early encounter with Persian miniature painting prompted an interest in figuration and narrative art that persists today. Paintings of this type were often kept in an individual's private home, perhaps shown to guests, and often contained explicit or taboo subject matter. Stylistic influences can be found directly in his practice: a lack of Western perspective norms, an assortment of figures and mischievous demons, and everyday interactions depicted in almost mythical, extravagant ways. Reflecting a similar darkly comic sensibility, his work often takes a cavalier approach to the darkness of life and history.

When he makes a more direct statement, it is always at a slight remove. In place of self-portraits, demons, the devil and the underworld enter the frame: *Hot Blood* (2023) and *Nightmare* (2022) depict mostly ordinary scenes, yet they feature creatures with red skin and horns as a stand-in for the artist. Decadent decorative backgrounds and surfaces further undermine the supposed mundanity of these moments. When scenes become bigger, more elaborate, a sense of depraved carnivalesque akin to Hieronymus Bosch the Elder takes over. *Jerk and hippy* (2022) is an intense close-up of a shoe stepping on open-toed sandals, while in *Mid-life crises* (2023), a balding, nude, middle-aged man jumps on a trampoline on his front lawn as his family watches with shame. The process of scaling up these images from sketchbooks necessitates the artist returning to the subject again and again, making small changes as memories fade and blur into each other. A certain image might hold his attention, slowly solidifying into a transformed idea with duration and the culmination of personal experiences: moving to a new city, frustrations with visas, the everyday grind of living as an artist.

Other paintings further complicate the practice. By depicting confrontations with the police, the leisure activities of bankers, and a frightened group fleeing over a militarised wall – *Three generations in one net* (2022) and *Goldman Sachs junior analyst team bonding exercise* (2023) and *We move at dusk* (2022) – Curchod cites a lineage of politically engaged painting. Briefly returning from a realm of fantasy, the artist appears to reveal his own position in a more direct manner, yet these scenes are still pieced together from memories and wrought with a profound sense of angst. Many of the aesthetic choices – the faceless portraits of men being arrested, the lurid green of the bankers, the shifting perspective on the wall-climbing figures – distort our perception of what is happening, of what is true or fictitious.

Dreams, mythology, forgotten histories, painting, popular cartoons and other forms of narrative are expressions of how we might conceive of ourselves and the world around us – they can also be tools to transcend our political and cultural horizons. Curchod's characters embody a devilish spirit. He weaves elaborate, complex images that are imbued with a poetic affirmation of imagination and feeling. The message of these paintings lives beyond their subject matter and process of construction; they gesture towards disobedience and rebellion, they ask us to look anew at the world.

—Chris Hayes

Chris Hayes is a writer based in Ireland and the UK. He has been published by Art Monthly, Burlington Contemporary, frieze, Tribune and The White Review among many others.

Artist Bio

Henry Curchod (b. 1992, Palo Alto, USA), currently lives and works in London. He obtained a BA/BFA from the University of New South Wales in 2014. His recent solo exhibitions include: 'Rice is god's dandruff', Chauffeur, Sydney, Australia (2022); 'Set your friends free', MAMOTH, London, England (2021); 'Sharing the Sky', Sumer Gallery, Tauranga, New Zealand (2021); 'Inside head, outside head', Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney, Australia (2021).

Recent group exhibitions include: 'Felix Art Fair', Gallery Vacancy, Los Angeles, United States of America (2023); 'In Between', Spurs Gallery, Beijing, China; 'Of Foxes and Ghosts', MAMOTH, London (2022), England; 'In Between', Spurs Gallery, Beijing, China (2022); 'Vacant II', Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai, China (2022); 'Art SG', Gallery Vacancy, Singapore (2022); 'Distance is Comfort', Chauffeur, Sydney, Australia (2022); 'Cave International 4.0', LAILA, Athens, Greece (2022); 'Steige 13', LAILA, Vienna, Austria (2022); 'It's raining inside', Lon Gallery, Melbourne Australia (2021); 'Strange Paradigm', Yngspc (curated by Kate Mothes) *virtual exhibition; and 'Nasha', Nasha Gallery, Sydney, Australia (2021).

Selected Awards and Residencies: Edwin Oostmeijer/ PPP Residency, Amsterdam (2023); Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship, Finalist (2021); Fortyfive Emerging Art Award (2017); Belle Magazine Art Prize, Winner (2016), etc.

1. *Tunnel*, 2022

Oil and charcoal on linen.
238 x 198.5cm

2. *A warm summer warning*, 2022

Oil and charcoal on canvas
15 x 20 cm

3. *Citizens Arrest !!!*, 2023

Oil and charcoal on linen
198.5 x 167 cm

4. *Live by the double edged sword, die by the double edged sword*, 2023

Oil and charcoal on linen
150 x 150 cm

5. *Bastard! (Night)*, 2022

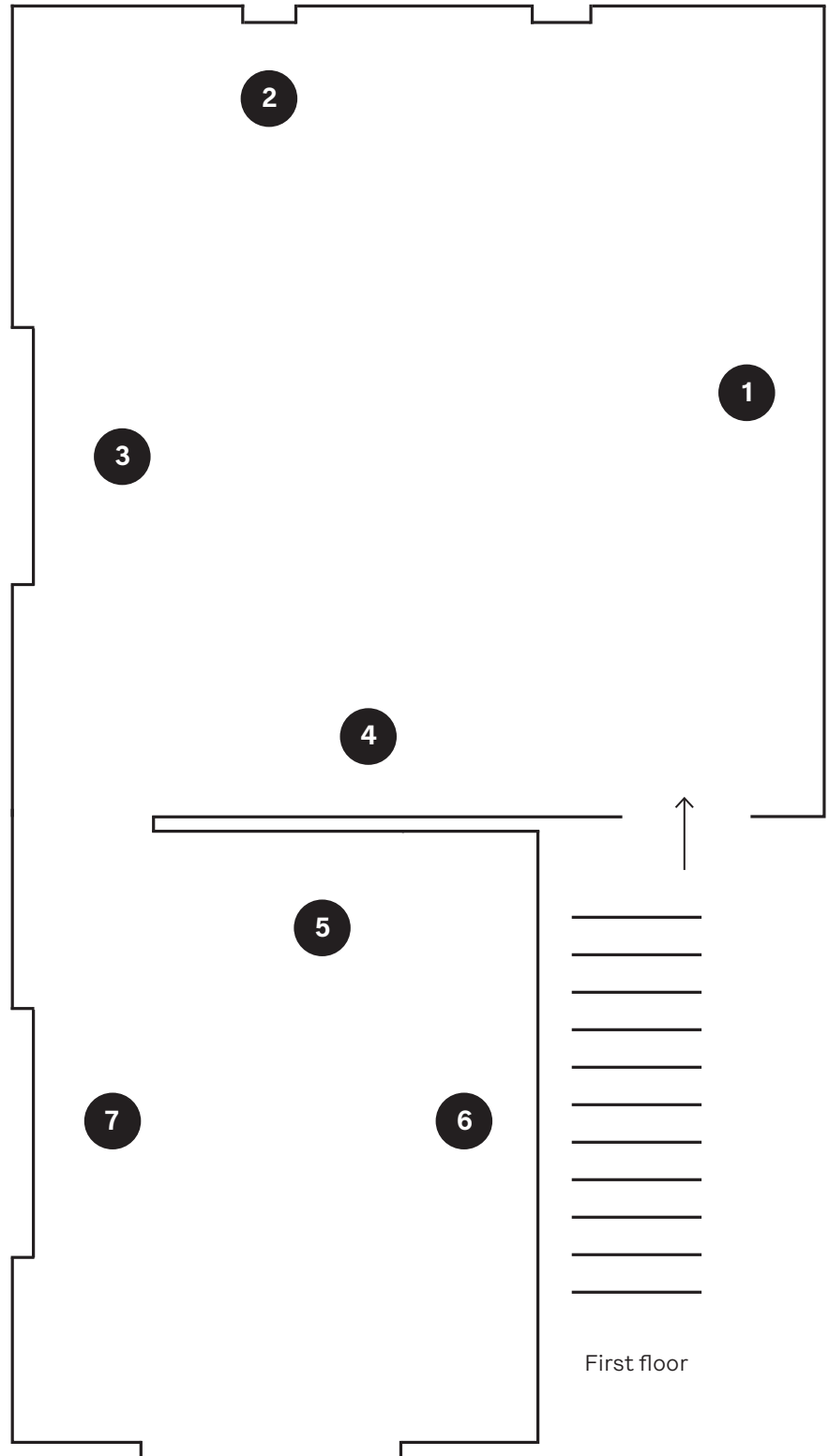
Oil and charcoal on linen
30 x 40 cm

6. *Mid-life crises*, 2023

Oil and charcoal on linen
150 x 150 cm

7. *Goldman Sachs junior analyst team bonding exercise*, 2023

Oil and charcoal on linen
181 x 150 cm



8. *Dorrigo blue*, 2023
Oil and charcoal on linen
200 x 170 cm

9. *Nightmare*, 2022
Oil and charcoal on linen
137 x 111 cm

10. *We move at dusk*, 2023
Oil and charcoal on linen
200 x 340 cm

11. *Narcotics Anonymous*, 2022
Oil and charcoal on linen
150 x 181 cm

12. *Hot blood*, 2023
Oil and charcoal on linen
120 x 100 cm

13. *Just like your mum*, 2023
Oil and charcoal on linen
181 x 150 cm

14. *Colander crowning*, 2023
Oil and charcoal on linen
120 x 100 cm

15. *Pockets to pockets*, 2022
Oil and charcoal on linen
242 x 200 cm

16. *Jerk and hippy*, 2022
Oil and charcoal on canvas
30 x 40 cm

17. *Footprint*, 2023
Sterling silver, Terracotta clay, Black marble, Cement, White marble, Lime, Terracotta, Slate, Graphite, Bentonite clay, Silica sand, York stone
25 x 27 x 63 cm

