

Tommy Harrison

Tone Cluster

May 12 – June 30, 2023
GRIMM, 54 White Street, New York, NY (US)



Tommy Harrison | *Prowler*, 2023

GRIMM is pleased to present *Tone Cluster*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by the Manchester-based, British artist Tommy Harrison (b. 1996, Stockport, UK). This is Harrison's first solo exhibition in the United States and first exhibition with GRIMM.

On view in the exhibition is a body of work that exemplifies Harrison's interest in the process of constructing and collapsing the painted image. Harrison begins by drawing directly onto the canvas using tailor's chalk, establishing an initial framework for each composition that becomes quickly discarded. Operating without preconceived logic, the process by which images emerge is circuitous, with the artist responding in stages to his own previous marks and gestures until a direction begins to reveal itself. This provides a blueprint, from which nascent formal and figurative imagery emerges, creating a point of tension from which Harrison can continue to build or dismantle with the application of oil paint.

Allowing for a kind of ordered spontaneity to guide his process, as opposed to contrived planning, Harrison slowly negotiates a plurality of possible compositional outcomes, working on multiple canvases simultaneously over weeks and months. His paintings are often anchored by a motif or found subject derived from art history and wider visual culture. Cropped bodies, animals, theatrical curtains, ornate patterns, anonymous landscapes or claustrophobic interiors, are appropriated and deployed as pure form, stripped of narrative or didactic function.

For Harrison, the semiotic value of his symbols is equal to that of their formal qualities. It is more about *how* the image is arrived at and not *what* it supposedly shows us. This leads to a deliberate discord over harmony, where narrative is evaded in favor of competing, even jarring, compositions. The image of the Crucifixion has appeared in a number of Harrison's recent works, but is variously cropped, rotated and hidden in order to undo the act of seeing such an oversaturated image laden with inherited significance.

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Detail | *Scuttle*, 2023

The emotive qualities of the so-called 'original' are stripped away, causing representational elements to function as shape, form and color. The meld of structural and iconographic elements leads to a feeling of incongruity or displacement, verging on the surreal, where characters are frozen and places are intangible and undefined.

Figures evade the viewer's gaze, emerging or fleeing from the picture plane altogether. As linear narrative has been avoided, our focus is drawn back to the handling of paint, which drifts from thick impastos to light taps and thin glazes. The material is often manipulated on the surface after application using a wide range of tools and techniques, building each image through the disparate properties of the medium, which navigate both economy and excess.

About the artist

Tommy Harrison (b. 1996) was born in Stockport (UK). He is currently studying for an MFA in painting at the Manchester School of Art, for which he received the Haworth Trust Painting Scholarship. Solo exhibitions include *Frozen Mid-Melt*, Pipeline Contemporary, London (UK). Harrison's work has been included in group exhibitions at Chapelle de l'Humanité, Paris (FR); Islington Mill, Salford (UK); Elysium Gallery, Swansea (UK) where he was shortlisted for the Beep International Painting Prize; Bankley Gallery, Manchester (UK) and Holden Gallery, Manchester (UK).

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