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Peter Brown A Big Year

28 October – 28 November
MESSUMS LONDON

A new exhibition of paintings by Peter Brown documents the spring and summer of 2020; from the empty streets of London to the masses crammed onto the beaches of the south coast of England.

Brown is one of the world's leading documentary painters. 'I like to be where the action is,' he says, and with his unrivalled ability to translate the bustle of human life into fluid and expressive paintings of the utmost poetry, his pictures gain ever increasingly in power. In this exhibition are paintings featuring the quiet interiors of his home and studio in Bath in the west of England peopled by his children craning over their phones in stances almost iconic of a generation, to the melee of colours and chaos of those enjoying the seaside.

In a further contrast are his paintings of the streets of London; no longer thronged with City workers the buildings of Chancery Lane and Fleet Street take on a different tone when viewed unobscured by teeming human life in an almost denuded majesty. 'Usually in Bank

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or Fleet Street I might see 300,000 people a day but during this period I probably didn't see more than 200' he says. 'London seemed powerful and hugely dramatic.'

Brown first became captivated by urban architecture and how it affects human interaction in Bath, where he studied in the mid-1980s on an art foundation course. After graduating from Manchester Polytechnic, he returned to the streets of the Georgian city, where he painted outside in all weathers. Unlike many painters of his generation Brown welcomes interruptions from the public. 'We are all social animals and although people can complain about each other the truth is we yearn to be a community and there is great joy in socialising for us.'

'Pete records day by day what he sees without prejudice,' says Johnny Messum, owner of Messums galleries. 'You can only observe change when you stand still and Pete does this by returning again and again to the same subject and place at different times, building up a fascinating record of how things are evolving that we might otherwise not notice or easily forget.'

The artist works in a style of wet-on-wet painting that dates back to great artists of the past like Sargent or Gainsborough. In terms of subject matter his works most closely relate to those by Sickert; recording the tiniest observations of human doings from someone tying up their shoelaces to feeding the birds and like Sickert he holds the distinguished post of being President of the NEAC or New English Art Club.

'I am mostly interested in the magic and poetry of everyday life,' he says. 'I am really trying to get to what I call lifting up the veil and getting closer to the real feeling of what life is doing.' The summer and autumn of 2020 have been equally telling, from our first tentative socially distanced forays out into public realms to the mass mayhems of overcrowded beaches, it is Brown's instinctive sensitivity to how we really are as people -coming together or being apart - that marks his way of painting as the perfect way to record what has been a big year by any measure.

Notes to editors:

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MESSUMS WILTSHIRE is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

MESSUMS LONDON is modernist gallery space on Cork Street where the family have had a presence since 1992.

MESSUMS YORKSHIRE opened in early July 2020. The third Messums gallery to open in England, it hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions with a focus on clients and artists in the North of England.

A comprehensive list of past and future exhibitions can be found on our websites.



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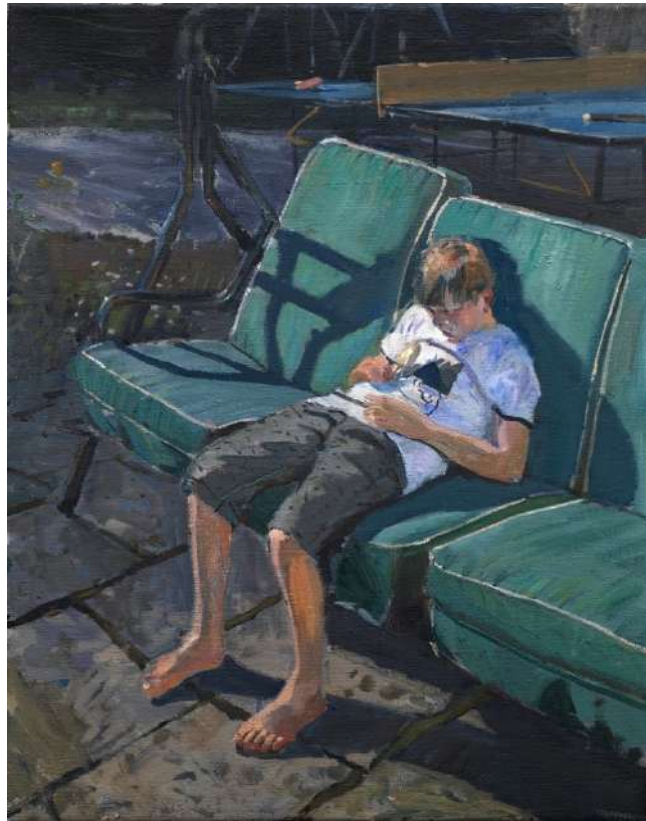
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