

PRESS RELEASE

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Tom Waugh, Jean-Vincent Simonet and Shaun Fraser

Messums London, 26 April – 26 May 2023

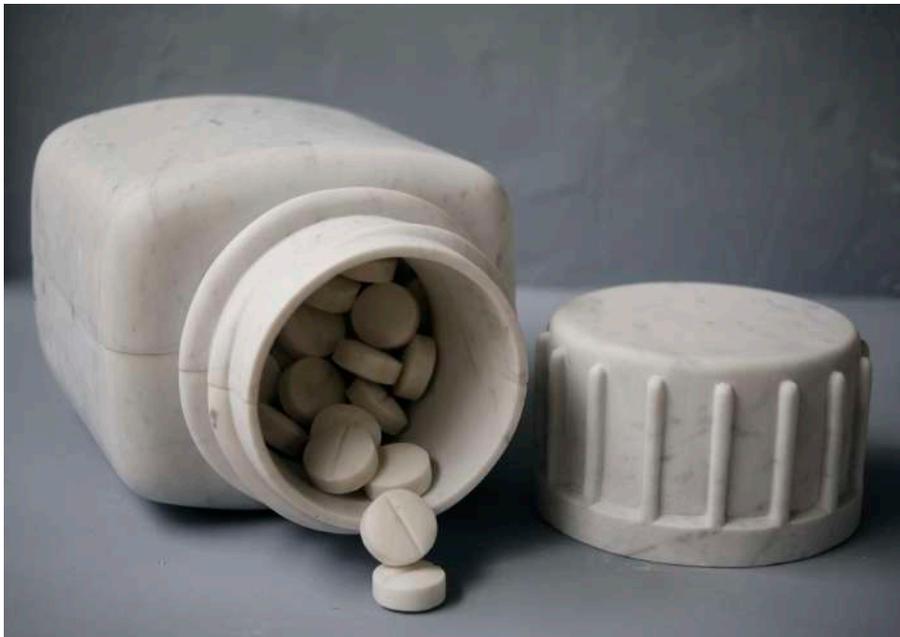
Preview: 26 April, 6pm

Artists Talks: 26 April, 3-6pm

3pm: Shaun Fraser

4pm: Jean-Vincent Simonet

5pm: Tom Waugh



Tom Waugh, *Big Pharma III*, 2022

An exhibition showcasing the work of three contemporary practitioners, sculptor Tom Waugh, photographer Jean-Vincent Simonet and visual artist, Shaun Fraser, opens at Messums London on 26 April. While the individual practices of these three artists are diverse, there are aspects shared and in sympathy. For each artist, materiality is an important factor – Waugh works with stone and marble, Simonet's prints blur the line between painting, sculpture and photograph and Fraser's chosen material relates closely to the location of the work, using moss or soil for example. The relationship between humankind and our environment is another shared thread with Waugh's work confronting important social and environmental issues and Fraser's practice questioning how the landscapes, spaces and places we inhabit form us and can be translated through personal engagement. However, while there are connections between these artists, the exhibition celebrates each of these artists individually in a dynamic presentation of their creative practices.

Tom Waugh

Tom Waugh makes sculptures from stone and marble that depict discarded, mass-produced objects. Plastic bags, cardboard boxes, and tin cans are squashed, crushed, and wrinkled, documenting the casual imprints of human use. Using the processes and techniques of classical marble carving, and paying close attention to form and surface detail, He achieves a high level of realism in his work.

Some of the sculptures are life-size, others are larger than life, and some appear, like fossils, emerging from the pristine rock. Materials are carefully chosen to achieve realism: white marble takes on the appearance of plastic or polystyrene, ironstone becomes rusty metal and Portland Stone is transformed into crumpled cardboard, rendering solid, immutable marble and limestone into the light malleable forms of discarded objects.

Despite the use of traditional materials and techniques, his work has tensions and contradictions: between classical and contemporary art; between temporality and permanence; and between humour and serious environmental and social issues. These contradictions can present a cognitive dissonance, challenging ideas of material value, and prompting a second look at the things we take for granted.

Running through his work is a desire to express mankind's paradoxical relationship with the natural world. We are both destructive and dependent on nature, being at its mercy at the same time as seeking to control and manipulate it. His work is infused with the uncertainty and irony of humanity's pursuit of progress, in the end, what is the purpose of this progress? Why are we doing this?



Tom Waugh, *Flat White ii*, 2023

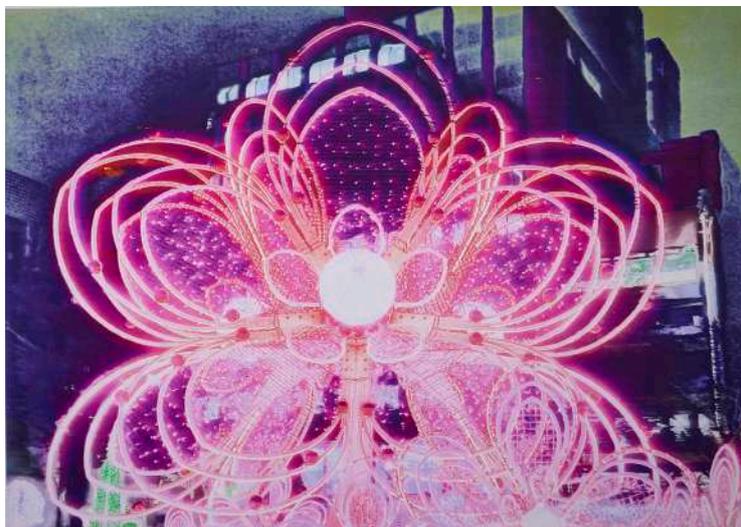
Jean-Vincent Simonet

Jean-Vincent Simonet is best described as an alchemist, creating pictures that sit uneasily in the borderlands between photography, sculpture, and painting. His unique approach is a result of his family heritage and his fascination with the process behind image making. After the establishment of a successful career as a photographer, he returned to his family's industrial printing factory, realising the huge potential for experimentation that was offered by industrial printing machines.

Simonet began to understand that through using heat, humidity and different drying methods, he could transform, erase, vanish, almost sculpt the surface of a print. The resulting works are printed on a plastic foil-type surface that has been put through a variety of processes whilst the ink is not yet fixed. No two pieces can ever be identical even if they are made from the same original file and the physicality involved and gestural expression that Simonet brings to each print is finally fixed when it is run through water for the last time.

This exhibition includes selects from two recent series – *Flowers, Novembre*, an on-going body of work that began in 2018, and *Sapporo Lights*, made in 2022 and seen here for the first time. Both series centre around images of flowers. For *Novembre* he builds floral still lives in the studio, using lighting systems that emphasises the artifice of the object, its gradients and hues, placed in deliberately uncanny compositions.

In contrast to the staged floral abstractions of *Novembre*, all taken on a medium-format camera, *Sapporo Lights* was shot with an iPhone whilst Simonet was travelling in Japan. These are pictures of large neon flowers, civic decorations erected in the streets of Sapporo and Hokkaido at Christmas time. The parallels and contrasts between the artifice of Simonet's studio still-lives and the man-made decorations leads to questions around artificiality, mimesis and intention.



Jean-Vincent Simonet, *Sapporo Lights #2*, 2022

Shaun Fraser

Shaun Fraser's work frequently comments upon notions of identity, links to landscape and connections with place. His practice questions how the landscapes, spaces and places which we inhabit form us and can be translated through personal engagement, privileging one's own memory as a principal source. Through this he acknowledges that memories of landscape, recalled with clarity when first encountered, can over time shift to become completely obtuse and non-linear, they become part-remembered-part-imagined places. In particular, much of his recent work has been evidence of his attempting to recall through visual means a fleeting sense of a specific place and time. With many of these works Fraser has attempted to distil his experiences of place down to their residual essences. The majority of the works displayed in this selection were developed whilst he was undertaking a residency in sub-arctic northern Iceland during the summer of 2022.

The *Faint Summer Shadows* series communicates the enduring sunlight giving way to a fragile twilight, the shifting of the long days, the swell of the elements as weather closes in and details of the landscape fade and then refocus. The series contains an impulse towards the ephemeral nature of landscape that is both acutely material and intensely spiritual.

Moss Carpet and *Moss (Sketch) I & II* also follow on from Fraser's time in Iceland, drawing from a particularly soft sunny day in August when he took advantage of the conditions and hiked far up into the mountains overlooking the studio – the path giving way to plump springy cushions of green bog. It remains a vivid memory of his time in Iceland.

A Northern Place ruminates upon Fraser's native Scottish Highlands. The Highland landscape is a constant theme revisited throughout his practice. This work is the latest in a series which grapples with the theme of memory as he recalls an indistinct evanescent location.



Shaun Fraser, *Faint Summer Shadows VII*, 2022



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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 a 2,000 sq ft exhibition space on Cork Street behind the Royal Academy. It hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions for our contemporary artists.