

Stephen Polatch *Swan-Road*

Margot Samel is excited to announce Stephen Polatch's first US solo exhibition, *Swan-Road*. The title of the exhibition draws from the Old English word *swan-rad*, a kenning for the word "sea," that is at the same time poetic and literal. Polatch dissolves the complex hierarchy of natural, architectural, and human orders, set within the urban milieu of Glasgow in his new works. Synoptic views of the city are parted, drawn like curtains, to reveal wild interstitial spaces where the real and fantastical mix. In his paintings, smiling flowers, magical fountains, and medieval castles are seen alongside wind turbines, pylons, and highways. The artist's images are fictions within fictions, full of vivid spontaneity, and unsettled by disorienting vantage points and surreal twists. They prompt us to examine what ornate variations of reality might exist unseen, within, or alongside, our own.

Swans are a central motif in Polatch's work. These elegant creatures have lived side by side with humans on the European continent for millennia and they have been invoked as symbols of loyalty and purity in Christian iconography, regional cultural traditions, and folktales. Hatchling swans will imprint themselves on their earliest caretakers and can just as easily develop a sense of being a human or a sheepdog, as they can a swan. The possibility of assuming another species' identity is so unfathomable to us that we can only approximate this experience through our dreams, but Polatch closes the abyss between such possibilities and reality. The artist presents us with vantage points that recall the out-of-body experience of dreaming, watching from above, as his figures move through a world in which they are modelling the shape of things around them.

Typically, a central exchange between Polatch's subjects is what matters most in his pictures. Moments such as these — crossing glances, collaborations between humans and animals, or inner visions projecting into the picture plane— occupy a focal point from which his compositions are bent around. Their compact scale also lends the works a concentrated sense of longing for something purer and more direct, which corresponds to his technique of applying unmixed pigment directly to the surface of the canvas. Polatch refutes a stable chronology, employing a wide range of historical references, from the lyricism and symbolic imagery of medieval illuminated manuscripts, the brilliant lighting of the Nabis, to the repetitive mechanics of Futurism—within the interconnected systems of Polatch's compositions is the promise, the rushing fluidity, of discovering the new in the familiar.

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Stephen Polatch (b. 1990, London, UK) lives and works in Glasgow, UK. Polatch received his BFA from at The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford, UK in 2013, and went on to study at the Royal Drawing School in London. Recent exhibitions include: *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Margot Samel, New York, US (2022); *Clyde*, Soft Opening, London, UK (2022); *Prestwick II*, New Glasgow Society East, Glasgow, UK (2022); *Peepers*, K Halstead, London, UK (2021); *A Many Voiced Argument with Life*, Glasgow International/Market Gallery, Glasgow, UK (2021); *Prestwick*, New Glasgow Society East, Glasgow, UK (2021); *The Amber Room II*, Amber Room, London, UK (2020); *Eigenheim*, Soft Opening, London, UK (2020); *Graven Images*, New Glasgow Society, Glasgow, UK (2019); *Drawings of Iasi*, Iasi, RO (2019); *Bilder*, New Glasgow Society, Glasgow, UK (2018), and *Unswept House*, Unit 42, Glasgow, UK (2017). Upcoming group exhibitions include: *To be a giant and keep quiet about it*, Yee Society, Hong Kong; *Viscereal*, Althuis Hofland, Amsterdam, NL.

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