

THE NOMADIC ART GALLERY PRESENTS “OLD BRAIN” , A SOLO EXHIBITION BY JAMES ROBINSON, PURSUING ITS DEDICATION TO THE CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND ART SCENE

Inaugurated in October 2021, the Leuven-based Nomadic Art Gallery unveils its third *in situ* exhibition as Dunedin-based James Robinson (Christchurch, 1972) exhibits his best works of the last 15 years in a solo-show called “Old Brain”



February 4, 2022 (Leuven, Belgium) – Following the successful opening of its first physical space in Leuven, Belgium, in October 2021, **The Nomadic Art Gallery**, the contemporary art gallery and public art and research project founded in 2020 by Gie and Arthur Buerms, pursues its exploration of the New Zealand contemporary art scene with its third on-site exhibition, **Old Brain**. From February 12, 2022—March 26, 2022, James Robinson's first solo exhibition, Old Brain, with an installation, paintings and drawings from the last 15 years opens in Belgium.

Old Brain is not only the title of the experimental three-dimensional mural but also the title of James Robinson first solo-exhibition in Belgium (Europe). *“Old Brain” refers to the primordial dimensions of human mental activity that are preverbal and instinctual, and which facilitate the integration of our memories, our fantasies, and our perceptions of the external world in the service of our efforts to negotiate our way through life in response to the terms imposed by the conditions of our existence. These primitive processes are overlaid by the inclusion of written text inscribed over certain panels, which shows how the cognitive part of the brain, with its ability to marshal the resources of propositional logic, subsequently comes to engage with these more instinctual operations.* (Alistair Fox- Professor Emiritus University of Otago - 28 May 2021)



The 4m long mural “Old Brain” consists out of 35 free-floating strips of ‘processed’ canvas from different periods of his illustrious career. This massive installation, which is the eye-catcher in the main space, connects the six paintings and ten works on paper of nearly 15 years of Robinson’s artistic production together. Robinson imbues his often monumental canvases with both pointed socio-political commentary, a variety of collaged found objects and rambling (self-)questioning texts as the artist continues to break down the hard edges of the painted grid while mapping his psyche. Philosophy, myth, memory spirituality, history and poetry are themes that manifest themselves through the installation, paintings and drawings on display. His works, ranging from hard-core underground paintings to the unbearable lightness of his works on paper, testament to Robinson’s dexterity in conveying not only the monumental and weighty, but also the complex and the sublime. Physical elements of his practice—from nails, wires, CD’s and glass to textiles, hair, stones and burned objects—are as symbolically resonant as they are vast-ranging.



By integrating, expanding, and regenerating imagery and techniques, Robinson brings to light the importance of the sacred and spiritual, myth and memory. The resulting pictures are deceptively abstract. Robinsons surfaces are loaded with the detritus of everyday life, an endless superposition of scraps of paper and forgotten objects of visual culture that carry their own meaning and history. Wear and neglect were rendered as a technique, striking an alchemical balance between chance and design, between connection and disconnection. The apparent method of composition suggests removal as much as addition, destruction as much as restoration, operating like a space-time continuum within which the central elements expand and contract. For Robinson, it seems that creation and destruction are one and the same, part of the process of life, death and rebirth.



The other-worldly, almost prophetic, visions Robinson offers the public are relics unearthed from an archeological site, documenting the parasitism of capitalism upon catastrophe. The aesthetic impact of his hallucinatory and mystic (non) compositions, chromatic scribbles and voluptuous stitching together of found objects recall a post-punk and free jazz aesthetic touching on a pessimistic decadence. The vitality of his paintings are a doorway to an elsewhere where archetypes from different civilizations are brought together in a synthetic syncretism. The use of text (mostly recycled poems by David Eggleton) serves to cancel or to contradict the painting. The text plays the role of devil's advocate, it challenges and interrogates the formally complex paintings. One can ask if cultural memory is formed by the stratification and association of objects and ideas, or rather by a historical or geographical specificity?



In essence, Robinson has created his own iconography, an iconography that is neither linear nor progressive in its development, but cyclical and reflective mirroring the artists view of life and history. A continuous conflict between light and dark, good and evil, myth and history runs not only through his work but through his veins. In the words of Alistair Fox, *Old Brain*, both as a painting (added:and an exhibition), captures not only the grandeur of the suffering that the human condition entails, but also attests to humanity's desire to transcend degradation, resist evil, and surmount the limitations of mortality. As such, it is a magnificent achievement that will surely come to be regarded as a landmark in the history of New Zealand art.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

About The Nomadic Art Gallery, Leuven, Belgium:

Founded in 2020 by Arthur Buerms and long-time partner Gie, The Nomadic Art Gallery is a contemporary art gallery and public art and research project currently based in Leuven, Belgium.

Building on a cyclical model rooted in the notion of nomadism, the initiative unfolds through two alternating phases. The first is an *in-situ* immersion within an underrepresented art scene, during which Arthur and Gie invest a mobile vehicle to conduct research in the given location, the latter ultimately becoming a public art project.

The second phase is set in a transitional gallery space – a temporary location in Europe which changes with each showcased art scene and where the duo initiates a dialogue between their research and the European contemporary art scene, through a program of both physical and online exhibitions.

Old Brain| solo exhibition by James Robinson
12 February - 26 March 2022
The Nomadic Art Gallery
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About James Robinson

James Robinson was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1972 and currently lives in Dunedin. He completed a Bachelor Of Fine Arts, Otago School of Fine Arts in 2000, Diploma In Art And Craft, Hungry Creek School of Art and Craft, 1996 and Foundation In Fine Art, Nelson Polytechnic, 1990.

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Robinson has exhibited regularly in private and public galleries both nationally and internationally. In 2007 he was awarded the prestigious Wallace Art residency in New York. In 2008 he was artist in residence at McCahon House Titirangi and was resident artist at Tylee Cottage, Whanganui later the same year. In 2019 he won People's Choice award at the Parkin Award exhibition in Wellington with a In and Out, a large work from his Pyramid series. James Robinson's work is held in numerous public, private and corporate collections throughout New Zealand and Australia such as James Wallace Trust Collection, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu, Eastern Southland Gallery, Ashburton Art Gallery, Te Manawa Museum, Otago University and New Contemporaries collection, Sydney.