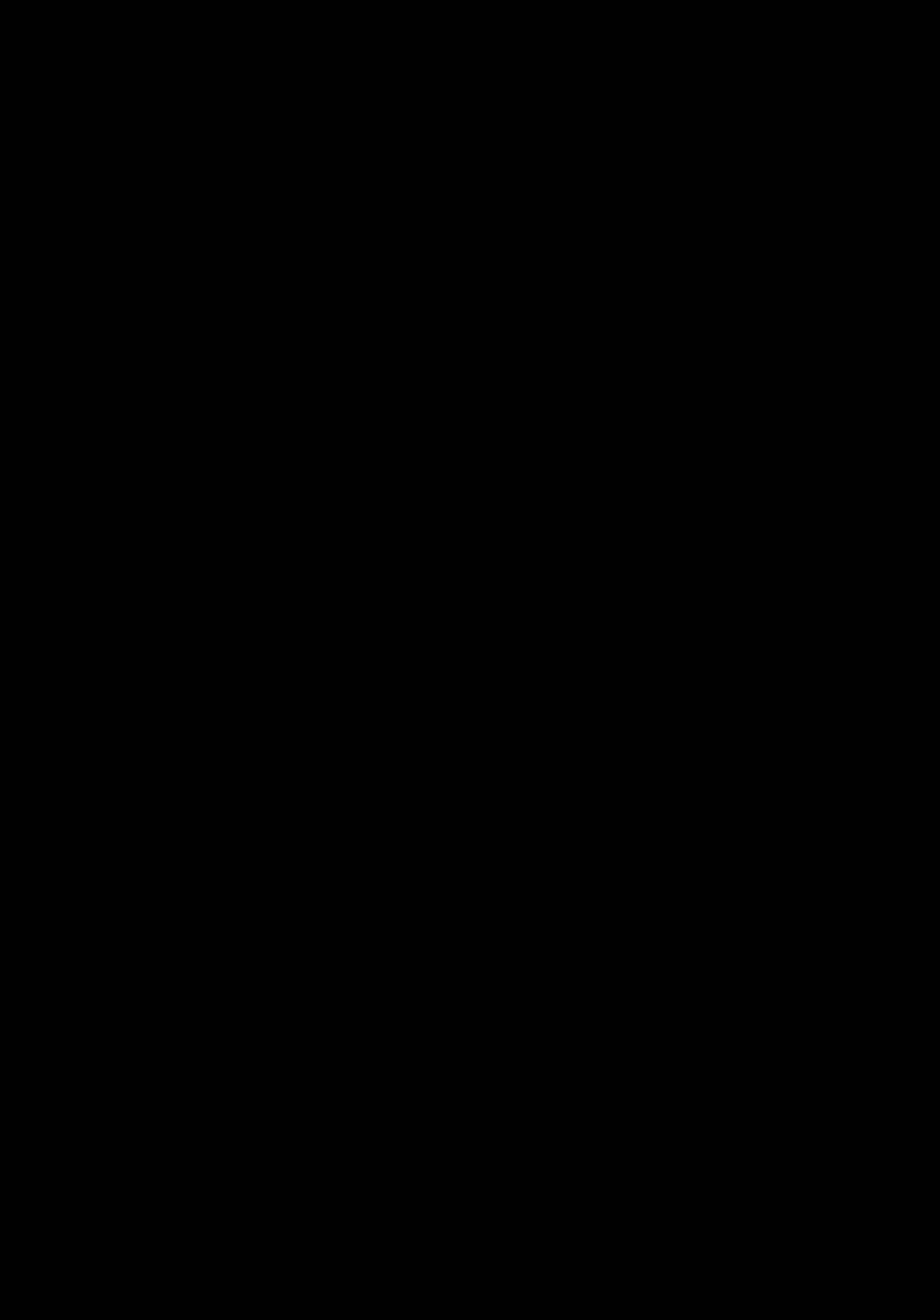




~~TRANSITIONS~~  
JAKE WOOD-EVANS

UNIT LONDON



~~T R A N S I T I O N S~~  
J A K E W O O D - E V A N S

U N I T L O N D O N

## Transitions

Words by Professor Catherine McCormack PhD

The act of looking to the past is always riddled with complexity. We can't help but look back through a lens of history that distorts what has come before, sometimes for better, often for worse. Sometimes the past comforts us, or it can unsettle. Sometimes we see with nostalgia, or sometimes with derision.

Perhaps the only constancy is that the past doesn't stay still, but can change. Such is the suggestion in Jake Wood-Evans' 2017 show *Transitions* at Unit London. Large scale canvases painted in oil conjure up the ghosts of old master paintings by Constable, Landseer, Rubens, Van Dyck, and others, as if seen through a rain-smear screen, or reflected in a beaten tin mirror. The effect is of something half-recognised and partly erased to create something new.

The interaction of time and the image is our subject matter here, rendered across the surfaces of the canvases, many of which have been intentionally scored and scratched to suggest the deterioration of age. In others such as *Portrait of a man with a beard, after Rubens*, the paint bleeds across the image as if melting; decomposing to reconfigure as something else. Other transformations unfold in *Reclining nude, after Boucher* in which the classical serpentine lines used to picture the female nude harden into blunt, linear brushstrokes that lend a geometric weight. The result is a body of work that mixes the figurative and abstract on the same canvas, blurring the boundary between the descriptive and the evocative.

While many of the works in this exhibition invoke an ephemeral, haunting vision of the original painting, others bring a dynamism to the surface, liberating an energy that was otherwise distilled in the original. For example, *The Hay Wain, after Constable* transforms the quiet, static grandeur of agricultural labourers at work in nineteenth-century Suffolk into an experiment in abstract expressionism with impasto bolts of white paint.

Other works pull our gaze inwards beyond these agitated surfaces into a murky middle ground where we seem suspended between points in time, such as *White horse in stable, after Henry Landseer*. Here, a ghostly horse, whose rider has evaporated in a milky haze of paint, hovers in a field of perception that suggests the not-quite-past and not-yet-present.

With a commitment to employing the tools, techniques and subject matter of the so-called 'Old Master' painters, Wood-Evans distinguishes himself from contemporary artists whose work responds to a prevailing appetite for the new. This was ever the case. At Falmouth School of Art in the late 1990s, the artist was 'radical' for his interest in draughtsmanship and the traditional artistic processes inherited from the Renaissance. During this time, teaching in British art schools tended to reject traditional techniques and subject matter in favour of more conceptual work.

This is exemplified in the defining art of Wood-Evans' student years - the notorious 'Young British Artists', who enjoyed commercial success with works made from found materials ranging from animals in formaldehyde, to blood, cigarettes and dirty bed linen.

Following his graduation, Wood-Evans was awarded a prestigious scholarship to study first-hand the paintings at the Museo del Prado in Madrid, a palatial setting housing the works from the former Spanish royal collection. It was here that he encountered the paintings of the seventeenth-century Flemish artist Rubens, reflected here in his tribute *After Rubens, Peace and War*. Where once there was clarity in the original painting, Wood-Evans adjusts the focus, turning the figures into veiled, semi-abstract mannequins, and heightening the sense of mystery. In such he encourages us to look again, beyond the surface of the traditional image and see anew.

In an age dominated by the ubiquitous screen that flattens out everything into a pixelated image in a frame, Wood-Evans work feels like a welcome antidote. First there are the surfaces, with their layers of paint creating a depth of composition that requires slow looking and mental absorption. Then the way in which many of the images themselves resist the borders and framing of the digital picture, as the raw edges of the canvas are left visible at the edges. Perhaps we are left with the potential that these works are ephemeral, ready to shift again at the next viewing.

Born in 1980, Wood-Evans also occupies a particular moment of transition in the history of the image. Not quite millennial, and a so-called digital immigrant, his is the last generation to have grown up without the dominance of social media and the 'Insta-image'. In such, the works in this show are defiantly analogue. His ambition has been to restore a sense of monumentality and quiet beyond the superficial aesthetic of the twenty-first century.

Although he claims that there is no uniting thread in this exhibition, and that the works are open-ended, we cannot help but think about a certain theme of Britishness, especially because the largest paintings in the show are inspired by British painters Landseer and Constable. *Hampstead Heath, after Constable* with its violent red nest of brushstrokes in the foreground invites us to see the heritage of the land with a different gaze, one that at this moment of our history is perhaps more chaotic and up for grabs. Other painters referenced in the show such as Van Dyck and Rubens both were foreign artists who produced work for the British monarchy in the seventeenth-century, so in a sense they also represent our historical entanglement with Europe. At a time when our history with Europe is breaking down and re-arranging - much like the paint and composition in these works- 'Transitions' seems to be a very apt metaphor.



*Dedham Lock and Mill, after Constable, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
160 x 120 cm  
£15,000.00



*Study for Hampstead Heath, after Constable, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
61 x 53 cm  
£4,200.00



*Hampstead Heath, after Constable, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
120 x 104 cm  
£9,000.00



*The Hay Wain, after Constable, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
160 x 120cm  
£15,000.00



*Wivenhoe Park, after Constable, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
200 x 135 cm  
£20,000.00



*After Rubens' Peace and War, 2017*  
Oil on Linen.  
200 x 135 cm  
£20,000.00





*White horse in a stable, after Sir Edwin Henry Landseer, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
200 x 160 cm  
£24,000.00





*Man facing right, after Anthony van Dyck, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
61 x 53 cm  
£4,200.00



*Portrait of a man, after Anthony van Dyck, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
61 x 53 cm  
£4,200.00



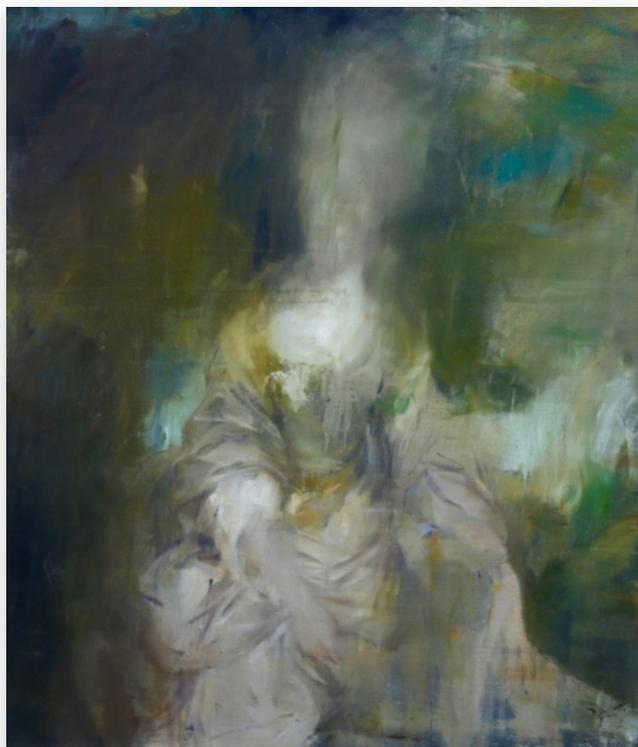
*Portrait of a man with a beard, after Rubens 1, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
61 x 53 cm  
£4,200.00



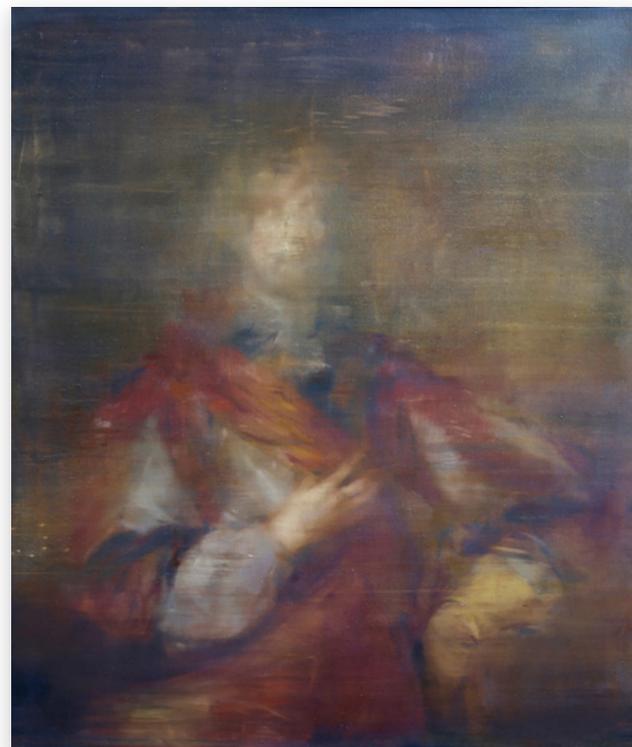
*Portrait of a man with a beard, after Rubens 2, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
61 x 53 cm  
£4,200.00



*Robert Rich, 2nd Earl of Warwick, after Anthony van Dyck, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
200 x 127 cm  
£20,000.00



*Portrait of Lucy Long, after Reynolds, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
120 x 104 cm  
£9,000.00



*Portrait of John Balasyse, after Anthony van Dyck, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
120 x 104 cm  
£9,000.00



*Study for Reclining nude, after Boucher, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
45 x 45 cm  
£3,800.00







*Reclining nude, after Boucher, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
180 x 130 cm  
£16,000.00



*Nude after Jacques Blanchard, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
62 x 52 cm  
£4,200.00



*Marie Pierre, after Baptiste, 2017*  
Oil on linen.  
48 x 45 cm  
£3,800.00





Jake Wood-Evans  
*Transitions*  
2017

Private View Thursday 30th November

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