

PRESS RELEASE**Sholto Blissett*****Ship of Fools*****2 July – 13 August 2022**

We are pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Sholto Blissett. Presenting a new body of work that pushes the physical and psychological stature of his visual language, this exhibition continues his exploration of the aesthetics of “Nature” and how our contemporary moment continues to challenge the ways in which we have historically chosen to understand our place in society and in the natural world. Composed of twelve paintings spread across each floor of the gallery, the exhibition draws from and evolves his previous work to create a rich vision of shifting imaginary landscapes, inhabited by a detailed and uncanny mosaic of architectural, marine and topographical forms. Together these images trace the manufactured and spectral relationship that society continues to have with nature and its place in the natural environment; and with deeper, more profound questions of home, identity and nation.

Despite differences in scale, composition and subject, the thread that connects each of these new works is Blissett’s signature use of a clear and striking centralised perspective. Evoking renaissance painting styles such as capriccio paintings of architectural fantasies or the *Veduta* — a highly detailed, usually large-scale painting of a cityscape or vista — as well as intimate architectural prints or etchings of Viennese Gardens, this positioning thrusts the viewer into an immediate and arresting personalised viewpoint. Uncommon for classical perspective painting, which usually employs a partially-angled view, this approach establishes a direct and dynamic relationship that emphasises the will to order and control, but also speaks to the solipsistic and romantic conception of an individualised subject at the centre of all experience; a paradigm that has been traditionally used to separate the spheres of nature and culture.

This frame of reference is also the means by which each painting’s architectural subject is recast and evaluated, centred at the vanishing point of the eye’s aperture. Forms that are familiar to us as a visual shorthand for Western power — the Church, State or Aristocracy — are here implied through Palazzo architectures, cold travertine walls and blank municipal facades; a purposefully vague and delocalised approach that nonetheless carries deep connotations of tradition, commerce and authority, symbolising a rising mercantile class, the birth of capitalism and the Enlightenment instinct for reason, science and progress. These austere and dreamlike buildings, accompanied by a series of pyramidal and obelisk monuments with monastic or mausolean sentiments, are conceived by the artists through a process of “intuitive architecture,” sketching directly to canvas with little to no preconception of their final character.

Gutted of specificity, these architectures assume a brutal, hollow place at the centre of a dynamic and luminous natural landscape, achieved through layer-on-layer of acrylic washes that form the warm undertones of each painting, followed by the meticulous application of oil in varying textures and techniques. Inspired in-part by Venetian waterscapes and marking a break from his previous series of works, “The Garden of Hubris”, structures are seen rising from impossible cascades of water or else on the precipice of imminent collapse; in every case, set

against a serene and mountainous skyscape. Used historically as means to illustrate the power of God in nature, these sublime landscapes continue to present us with a view of Nature that folds cultural constructions of “wilderness” into ideas of nation-building, land conservation and ownership, in many cases weaponised as an important and legitimating discourse for further expansion in the colonial history of Europe and Northern America.

Taking its name from a passage of Plato’s *Republic*, in which a ship with a dysfunctional crew is used as an allegory for the failure of a political system based on incorrect ideas, *Ship of Fools* speaks to this flawed sense of human desire and its hubris. Seen here slowly devouring itself, the separation of nature and culture is no longer tenable, illustrating that the more we attempt to separate these two spheres, the more we realise how inseparably entwined they really are. Steeped on the verge of collapse, with burning fire pits and a few open windows evoking the last ghostly whispers of human presence, these works gesture to the increasing threat of climate and environmental breakdown — recall the close of Foucault’s *The Order of Things*: “man” is like a face drawn in the sand, eventually wiped away by ocean tides — but more presently on the inherent instability between subject and object, civilisation and wilderness, that underpins the logic of Enlightenment and still holds considerable force in the ways we understand our relationship to and place in the natural world.

Sholto Blissett (b.1996, Salisbury, UK) lives and works in London. Blissett graduated in 2020 with an MA in Painting at the Royal College of Art. Recent group exhibitions include *Lost at Sea*, The Artist Room, London UK (2022); *The Natural World: Part II*, Alexander Berggruen, New York, US (2022); *Utopia*, Peres Projects, Berlin, DE (2021); *Tree and Leaf*, Hannah Barry Gallery, London, UK (2021); *The Earth, That is Sufficient*, Nicola Vassell, New York, US (2021); *Sholto Blissett, Emma Fineman, Madeline Peckenpaugh*, Alexander Berggruen, New York, US (2021); *Down in Albion*, L.U.P.O, Milan, IT (2021); *CIRCA 2020*, Piccadilly Circus, London, UK (2020); *50/50*, FOLD Gallery, London, UK (2020); and *Tomorrow: London*, White Cube, London UK (2020). Blissett has forthcoming solo shows in 2023 with Alexander Berggruen, New York, and Peres Projects, Milan.