

# ARUSHA

GALLERY



Image: Kirsty Whiten, *Anointing (orange)*. Acrylic and oil on canvas: 150 x 150cm.

## **Kirsty Whiten: *ICON ORACLE***

**8 June - 25 June 2018**

**Preview: Thursday 7 June 2018, 6-8pm**

### **Monumental paintings explore the personal and mythical in powerful solo exhibition by Scottish artist**

Personal transformation and mythical inspiration will be the focus of mesmerising, large-scale portraits in a new Edinburgh exhibition this summer. *ICON ORACLE*, a solo show composed of new works by Scottish painter **Kirsty Whiten** at Arusha Gallery, will explore the power of vulnerability through a stunning visual reinterpretation of initiation ceremonies.

An Edinburgh College of Art graduate and now based in Fife, Whiten (b.1977) excels at weaving human emotions in her hyperrealist paintings, which often trigger a deeply-layered response. These new portraits in this exhibition will comprise a group of six oil paintings (*ICONS*) and a set of eight smaller, intimate watercolours (*ORACLES*).

The *ICONS* oil and acrylic paintings (150 x 150cm) depict pairs of naked figures in a transformative, threshold moment of a ritual. They rub bright pigments onto each other's skin, as they tenderly cradle each other through a moment of personal transformation. Painted with vivid colours on a dark matte acrylic background which contributes an otherworldly feel to the scenes, the figures are visually arresting: the bodies take on a real physicality thanks to Whiten's talent for representing the body, and convey a very human moment of emotional vulnerability. Through her depictions of beads, bodypaint and impromptu headdresses, Whiten transcend religious connotations or references to particular time period, and succeeds in highlighting the universal themes of surrender and acceptance.

Whiten created the works in *ICON ORACLE* on the back of what she identifies as a year of personal crisis; the resulting works evoke a longing for safety in intimacy, and a desire to be held in a moment of changing identity. The figures bask in tender embraces even in moments of vulnerability, relying on and being supported by those around them. With the Icon series Whiten succeeds in capturing fleeting moments of emotions laid bare, a few seconds where time has stopped and healing takes place.

In contrast, Whiten's *ORACLES* series of watercolours (40 x 50cm) depicts intricate, almost surreal figures in situations reminiscent of witchcraft and shamanism, and where once more the figures' detailed poses and facial expressions are mesmerising in their humanity and realism. Whiten worked with found photographs, and free association of thoughts and dreams, for some of the works: for instance a group of elders around a campfire, an enigmatic female figure whose body turns into a cornucopia of fruit as she smokes a cigarette, an old woman whose body blends into a monumental boulder, and a mythical beast inspired by Francisco de Goya's apocalyptic prints. In Whiten's delicate watercolours, the twisted characters and bodies are reminiscent of the grotesque scenes of Hieronymus Bosch.

The *ORACLES* watercolours function as symbols and archetypes: what the leading psychoanalyst Carl Jung referred to as a primitive mental image inherited from our earliest human ancestors, and supposed to be present in the collective unconscious. As a result Whiten sees the watercolour as resisting fixed interpretation, not unlike a psychoanalyst's ink splats or the cards of a tarot deck. The characters are simultaneously enigmatic and humorous, and invite repeated viewings and contemplation.

Whiten's work is instantly identifiable, minute and precise yet alive with energy and humanity. Despite the religious connotations of the title, Whiten's work echoes universal, timeless notions and belief systems. Through her use of ritualistic iconography - for instance a figure leaning back in ecstasy - she expands the themes of healing and belonging back to their original meaning, devoid of religious limitation. In *ICON ORACLE* she succeeds in capturing the deeply personal and universal at the same time.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

### **Kirsty Whiten**

Kirsty Whiten was born in St Andrews, Scotland in 1977 and graduated from Edinburgh College of Art in 1999 with a degree in Painting. Her work has appeared in group and solo exhibitions throughout the UK, as well as international venues in Europe, the USA and Australia. Her work is in the collection of St Andrews University and Edinburgh Printmakers Workshop.

### **Arusha Gallery**

13A Dundas St, Edinburgh EH3 6QG  
[www.arushagallery.com](http://www.arushagallery.com)

Open Monday-Saturday, 10am-5pm. Open Sunday by appointment.

For more information and images: 0131 557 1412 and [info@arushagallery.com](mailto:info@arushagallery.com)