

For immediate release
28 February 2022

BENJAMIN HANNAVY COUSEN

Rings of Saturn & *Other Objects*

Gallery 8
8 Duke Street, London SW1Y 6BN
10 – 21 May 2022



Benjamin Hannavy Cousen, 'Chernobyl Prayer' 2020 (detail)

From 10th- 21st May 2022, **Merville Galleries** will present *Rings of Saturn & Other Objects*, a second solo London exhibition of recent work by Benjamin Hannavy Cousen, at **Gallery 8**. Hannavy Cousen's work is a celebration of colour and form, challenging the distinction between painting and sculpture, exploring the physical possibilities of paint.

Hannavy Cousen (b. 1977) makes each work as a response to, and rendition of, a text, normally a work of fiction: *1984*, *The First Circle*, and *The Sea, The Sea (History)* are recent examples. His premise is that every text we read is made up of multiple levels of meaning including a 'colour unconscious' which these paintings aim to render visible. While each work is saturated with the politics and concerns of the original text, his layering of colour also forms strange and unusual shapes that make something new from each book. **Prices generally range from £5,000 - £20,000 and a percentage of the proceeds of all sales from the exhibition will go to Refugee Tales for their charitable work.**

Hannavy Cousen's unique artistic process begins when reading a novel. He picks out colour words from the text and creates a chronological log which then determines his

palette and the arrangement of paint on the canvas. At first this seems an objective process, however descriptions of time of day and atmosphere can sometimes be just as important as literal mentions of colour. For example, the words: 'dusk', 'dawn', 'smoke' and 'blood' all evoke a certain colour in one's consciousness.

The artist's undergraduate degree in Art History & English Literature, followed by his PhD in the field of cultural memory, have both significantly informed his practice. Hannavy Cousen describes the act of reading as a process of simultaneous remembering and forgetting. He uses a syringe and needle to apply paint onto the surface and create a layered effect demonstrative of this idea: early colours injected onto the surface are buried by subsequent layers, but all remain as a kind of archaeology of memory. Over months of layering paint in this way, the artworks become sculptural in their physicality.

Though there is a level of control in his process - the choice of colours, his mathematical division of the painting- Hannavy Cousen is not too prescriptive; there is also an element of unpredictability, where accidents happen and explosions within the paint occur. He is open to these accidents and sees them as of equal importance to the elements he can control.

Benjamin Hannavy Cousen in his studio (below)

The narrative is often recognisable through the artwork, sometimes subtly (in *Chernobyl Prayer*, for example, layers of glow-in-the-dark paint create an invisible but present threat). However, the most important thing is that the paintings speak for themselves. Hannavy Cousen's works may start with the books, but they ultimately take on a life of their own: **"It is important to me that people can see**



and like the paintings without knowing anything about the books. The origins are hopefully just an added level of interest for the viewer. I often forget about the book once I get into it; the painting is the thing..."

"After postponing twice, we are thrilled to finally be holding our second solo exhibition of Benjamin's work; with his paintings there is no substitute for seeing the works in person to understand his unique methodology and appreciate the complexity of the creative process. In this exhibition he has further developed his techniques and broadened the range of literature used as initial references."

Thomas Lighton, Merville Galleries

A short film, 'Needle Work' by Richard Poet showing the artist at work in his studio can be viewed here: [Needle Work](#)

Notes to editors

Exhibition dates: 10th – 21st May 2022; opening hours 10AM - 5PM daily (except 21st May 10am - 1pm) closed Sunday 15th May.

Gallery Address: Gallery 8, 8 Duke Street, London SWY 6BN

Works mentioned reference the following titles:-

- George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, first published 1949
- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, first published 1968
- Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, first published in 1997
- Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*, first published 1978

About Merville Galleries

Merville Galleries was launched in September 2012 by Thomas Lighton and specialises in Modern British Art and Contemporary Art by established and emerging artists. He has forty years' experience of working in the art market, with previous roles as Managing Director at Waddington Galleries and more recently as a director of Agnew's. He has been Chairman of the Society of London Art Dealers (SLAD) twice, from 1993 – 1995 and again from 1998 – 2000.

Contact:

01798 865848 (m. 07989 517486)

thl@mervillegalleries.com

About Refugee Tales

A percentage of the proceeds of all works sold at the exhibition will go towards Refugee Tales for their charitable work; author Ali Smith, who is a patron for the charity, has written the foreword for the exhibition catalogue and requested that her fee be donated to the charity.

www.refugeetales.org

For further information, images, and interview opportunities, contact:

Annie McGrath (annielouisemcgrath@gmail.com)

or Lucy Barry (lucyaffbarry@gmail.com)