

# Alexander James: Tuck Shop For The Wicked

23 September - 18 November 2023

Private View:

22 September 2023 | 6:00-8:00pm

For further information, please contact:

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Alexander James, *Crowned*, 2023, oil on canvas

*Progressing to the shop next door. Opens a colourful world of sweets varying in size, colour and depth. Stood tall was Henry Kaminsky, on his second encounter, his second direction—the saloon was running itself by this point, so it was time to neighbour another local enterprise.*

*A place where affairs would regularly occur, in a place so innocent, only to find the fingerprints brushed and spread onto the steel surfaces in the back room where all the escapades transpired.*

*These paintings are a hybrid of details, focusing on the manoeuvres and antics that occurred during a timeline of owning this 'Tuck Shop' a modified word I've used to relate it to my own sweet tooth fascination, looking at transpired events filled with love, affairs, arguments, and business deals.*

*Stripping it down to the bare minimum, exposing elements which can get left behind. How would the candy selection respond if woken at night to find a couple going at it.*

- Alexander James

Marlborough London is delighted to present *Tuck Shop For The Wicked*, a solo exhibition of eight new works by Alexander James.

James's practice draws on a variety of material references such as family letters and photographs, found memorabilia, and ancient artefacts, as well as personal conversations, emotions, and passed-on memories. Mixing real and imagined experiences, James understands his canvases as a visual cache to both past and present, merging elements of portraiture and abstraction to collate the history of his artistic references with the history of his family.

The creation of a multi-layered, highly personal iconography also informs James's reference to his enigmatic great-grandfather, Henry Kaminsky. Based on inherited memories rather than the artist's own experience, the vivid, saccharine palette of his canvases recalls the candies that were sold at Kaminsky's "Tuck Shop", an infamous East London institution, while his profile emerges from layers of kinetic mark-making, warm hues and brushstrokes that are scraped away into abstract forms. In this way, James's paintings return us to the question of objectivity which his corporeal abstractions

seem to grapple with: can abstraction ever be detached from lived experience?

As a child James would visit the British Museum with his grandfather, admiring the ancient sculptures, entablatures, and friezes. Attempting to re-engage with this memory, the heroic antique figures form the compositional basis of his portraiture. Fragments of their biomorphic forms are transformed through thick painterly strokes to reveal abstracted portraits of James's grandfather, thus engendering a new, hybrid monument to his childhood memory.

The superimposition of parallel histories is also mirrored in James's formal approach. The heavy layering and subsequent removing of paint diffuses compositional clarity, thus disrupting a straightforward reading of the images in favour of a more complex, polyvalent consumption. The paintings take on a transcendent quality, as if seen through a fog that only gradually lifts as we begin to discern the figures.

James's simultaneous push and pull of addition and subtraction creates an interesting paradox that aligns with the ancient practice of *Damnatio Memoriae*, the 'condemnation of memory'. Practiced across ancient civilizations of Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia, this entailed a ritualistic destruction of images whereby an unpopular Emperor who was violently removed from power might be literally carved out from coins, statues were pulled down, names on inscriptions hacked away.

This active reshaping of history is comparable to James's practice and the ways in which he repurposes the memories of his forefathers alongside emblems of ancient iconography, just as the act of erasure in his paintings serves to continually alter and refashion stories from his family lineage. A collection of mnemonic devices, his paintings celebrate the complex language of memory from both the immediate present and past.

Alexander James (b. 1993) received a BA from Camberwell College of Art in 2015. His work has been shown at Super Zoom, Paris; Room 57 Gallery, New York; Kopenicker Str. 80, Berlin; Project X, Milan and Marlborough Gallery, London. James currently lives and works in London.

## **Marlborough**

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Monday - Friday 10:00-5:30  
Saturday 10:00-4:00

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