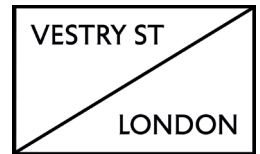


**CHARLIE SMITH LONDON**



## **PRESS RELEASE**

Vestry St.  
Floor 1  
6-8 Vestry Street  
London  
N1 7RE

**Exhibition Runs: 13 September to 18 October 2025**  
**Opening Preview: Friday 12 September, 6-8pm**

## **The Discontents: Part II**

Curated by Xavier Ellis

Matthew Collings, Xavier Ellis, Sarah Kent and Sharon Leahy-Clark, Michael Petry,  
Max Presneill, David Risley, Rebecca Scott

The Discontents: Part II assembles a group of artists whose practices extend beyond the boundaries of conventional studio production. These individuals are not only makers but also thinkers, writers, curators, critics, and institutional figures—a cohort of contemporary polymaths who actively challenge the separation between artistic creation and cultural discourse.

Following its first edition in 2018, this second iteration of The Discontents reflects a shift in focus, in some cases shaped by the artists' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are no longer simply art world protagonists who maintain a studio practice; making now constitutes the core, if not the entirety, of their output. Yet their histories of operating at the intersections of production, theory, and mediation remain evident, with polymathic methodologies that are fluid, diverse, and grounded in a complex ecology of thought.

Featuring Matthew Collings, Xavier Ellis, Sarah Kent & Sharon Leahy-Clark, Michael Petry, Max Presneill, David Risley, and Rebecca Scott, the exhibition does not seek to unify these diverse voices into a single narrative. Instead, it highlights interwoven concerns—identity, histories, and socio-political contexts—that resonate across their practices. Each artist navigates the complex interplay between the personal and the political, reflecting the multifaceted nature of contemporary cultural discourse.

*The Private View will include a performance by Sarah Kent and Sharon Leahy-Clark, where they will create a collaborative work live.*

## About the artists

**Matthew Collings** is an artist, writer, and broadcaster whose work spans painting, criticism, and television. He edited the magazine *Artscribe*, was art critic for the BBC's *The Late Show*, wrote hilariously confessional art columns for *Modern Painters* and several influential books, including *Blimey! From Bohemia to Britpop*, which was published by David Bowie. His TV programmes on art won many awards including a BAFTA.

His *Alternative Art Histories* series reimagines the visual language and concepts of art history through works on paper, and more recently large oil paintings, challenging habitual thinking and canonical structures. Politically engaged, this ongoing series foregrounds issues of power and representation, subjectivity and the rules, and expands the discourse surrounding art's past and present.

**Zavier Ellis** is an artist, curator, and educator. Founder & Director of CHARLIE SMITH LONDON, he is also co-founder of *The Future Can Wait*, one of London's most significant curated exhibitions of emerging art, and Contemporary Art Academy, an online education platform.

His work combines text, collage, and abstraction to explore themes of history, revolution, and protest. Ellis' layered compositions invite viewers into a dialogue with the artwork's fragmented narratives. His practice reflects a deep engagement with the complexities of globalism and socio-politics.

**Sarah Kent** is a renowned art critic and writer who was Visual Arts Editor at *Time Out* for 30 years. She has authored numerous books and exhibition catalogues including *Shark Infested Waters*, and is known for her incisive, often provocative commentary on contemporary art. Kent was also Director of Exhibitions at the ICA in London for 2 years.

Her practice explores themes of identity, desire, and representation, often through the lens of gender and media. She employs painting, drawing, and performance to create works that are both personal and political. In this exhibition, Kent will show a piece made during a live performance with artist Sharon Leahy-Clark, her partner in the drawing duo *Head on a Plate Projects (HOPP)* which they founded in 2022.

**Michael Petry** is an artist, writer, and Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) London. He has authored many books including *Mirror Mirror: the reflective surface in contemporary art*, *The Word is ART*, and *Nature Morte*, all published by Thames & Hudson.

His interdisciplinary practice encompasses installation, sculpture (bronze, glass), and performance, often drawing from classical narratives and queer theory. His works engage with themes of identity, mythology, and institutional critique, creating objects and immersive environments that challenge conventional perceptions and invite viewers to reconsider cultural norms.

**Max Presneill** is an LA based artist, writer, curator at Torrance Art Museum, and organizer of BLAM, TRYST, NOMAD and Durden and Ray.

His paintings combine abstraction with figurative elements, exploring existential drive, class and political sub-texts, tribalism, sub-cultural iconography, and masculine identity via mapped structures. Discursive formations evolve between images, gestures, signs, and symbols in a fluid and multi-layered network of meanings and possible relationships.

**David Risley** is an artist, curator, writer, educator, and former gallerist, having run David Risley Gallery in London and Copenhagen for 20 years.

Drawing inspiration from the intimate and restrained practices of artists such as Chardin, Hammershøi, Cezanne, Morandi, Katz, and Neel, his work explores the profound potential of modest subjects including family, friends, and immediate domestic surroundings. Demonstrating that meaning in painting is not dependent on grand narratives or spectacle, Risley engages with observation, intimacy, and the expressive possibilities of stillness.

**Rebecca Scott** is the founder of Cross Lane Projects and Vestry St. Her practice explores the tension between figuration and abstraction, using layered imagery to examine identity, visibility, and the politics of representation. Scott's *Migrants* series reflects on displacement and erasure, depicting figures in states of flux—partially obscured, dissolved, or emerging from gestural fields. Avoiding narrative and spectacle, Scott invites reflection on what is seen, silenced, and overlooked.

ENDS

Notes for editor

Opening hours: Thursday to Saturday, 12-5pm.

For more information / high res images contact: [direct@charliesmithlondon.com](mailto:direct@charliesmithlondon.com)



Matthew Collings: *Self-portrait as male and female painter Helen and Bob*, 2025  
Oil, pastel, charcoal on canvas, 61 x 122cm



Sarah Kent & Sharon Leahy-Clark, *Sodd Noddy*, 2023  
Mixed media on paper, 118 x 98cm



Max Presneill, *Room 108, Protest Point. (Scope)*, 2025  
Oil, acrylic, spray paint, marker pen, photo-transfer, sticker  
on canvas 183 x 162.5cm

Vestry St. opened its doors in 2022 in Vestry Street, Hoxton in London in association with Cross Lane Projects. Visitors are invited into this uniquely intimate space to read, reflect, discuss, and view contemporary art in a salon-like setting. Located in a private residence on the road that bears its name, Vestry St. presents a programme of curated exhibitions and events by leading contemporary artists, both local and international.

Cross Lane Projects is a contemporary art gallery based in Kendal, Cumbria. Founded in 2018 by artists Rebecca Scott & Mark Woods, the gallery is situated in a former Kendal Mint Cake factory in the town centre and aims to bring new and contemporary art to Cumbria. Cross Lane Projects presents a curated programme of contemporary exhibitions by local, international and British artists with accompanying talks and events.