



MAT COLLISHAW. ALBION

2 February – 2 June 2018

Mat Collishaw is a prominent figure in British contemporary art and a founding member of the Young British Artists. He gained early recognition in 1988 at the *Freeze* exhibition in London, organized with his friend and fellow Goldsmiths College classmate, Damien Hirst. The exhibition marked a turning point in Western European art, shifting focus away from the '80s painting revival toward a more confrontational, socially engaged practice rooted in everyday realities—and served as a watershed moment that catalyzed the emergence of a new generation of artists: the *Young British Artists* (YBAs).

At the heart of Collishaw's practice lies a fascination with illusion and desire. He dissects and destabilizes everyday perceptions of familiar images, exploring how hidden mechanisms and visual techniques influence the viewer's subconscious. His works balance poetic romanticism with dark illusionism, often touching on themes of moral ambiguity and psychological depth. He gravitates toward narratives that have been repressed, obscured, or culturally marginalized: *"I'm inspired by episodes from the past that were suppressed or held at a distance. They generate new ideas."*

Collishaw frequently draws on the visual language of the old masters. Many of his works reference historical narratives and employ classical approaches to rendering nature, filtered through the cultural aesthetics of past eras. These appropriated images are digitally reprocessed and recontextualized, advancing his ongoing inquiry into the interplay between representation and reality.

In the ***Black Mirrors series (St. Sebastian, Andromeda, 2017)***, classical paintings by Niccolò Renieri and Vlaho Bukovac appear as ghostly apparitions in black Murano glass-framed mirrors. These animated, spectral figures come to life before the viewer's eyes, reenacting scenes from renowned artworks and collapsing the boundary between the material world and the realm of classical painting.

Collishaw's sustained interest in the Victorian era is deliberate. Nineteenth-century Britain presented itself as a beacon of scientific rationalism and empirical rigor. In referencing this period, Collishaw both emulates its ornate, romantic aesthetics and exposes its darker underside—where human nature, with all its primal impulses, remains constant regardless of technological or cultural progress. He also engages with early Victorian visual technologies, such as pre-cinematic devices and photographic innovations, which he uses to recreate the illusionistic effects at the foundation of modern animation.

A prime example is ***All Things Fall (2014)***, a monumental kinetic installation created for the Galleria Borghese in Rome. Inspired by Ippolito Scarsella's ***The Massacre of the Innocents***, this haunting zoetrope comprises 300 individually crafted figures rotating at 60 revolutions per minute, while synchronized LED lights flash 18 times per second. Though the figures themselves remain still, the stroboscopic effect produces a chilling illusion of motion. This optical spectacle, blending ethereal beauty with brutal subject matter, was hailed by critic Waldemar Januszczak as "nothing less than a contemporary masterpiece."

Albion (2017) presents a ghostly projection of the famed oak in Sherwood Forest, reputed to have sheltered Robin Hood. The thousand-year-old tree, which began decaying centuries ago, has been propped up by elaborate steel supports since the Victorian era.

Created via laser scanning and animated using the Pepper's Ghost technique, Collishaw's version reveals a living form suspended in a perpetual state of artificial life—trapped between legend and mortality, between history and illusion.

The theme continues in the ***Gasconades series (2017)***, a set of hyperrealistic oil paintings depicting garden birds. These images recall the bird and animal studies of seventeenth-century Dutch painters like Carel Fabritius (***The Goldfinch, 1654***), bridging naturalist observation with the cultural memory of still-life traditions.

"My desire is to show the viewer how the time in which we live affects our perception of the world around us. These days, it's difficult to slow down and absorb imagery of the past. Over time, our perception of paintings changes—not only because they become iconic, but because the media around us has totally changed. We don't generally stand around looking at a picture that's not moving, because it's not that interesting compared to what else is on offer. I'm trying to reintroduce the concept of time to these works, to prompt the viewer to look at each of them a little longer and thus immerse themselves in the history of each picture."

— Mat Collishaw

Collishaw's work has been exhibited in major museums and public collections worldwide, including Tate Modern (London, UK); Somerset House (London, UK); Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (UK); Galleria Borghese (Rome, Italy); Pino Pascali Museum Foundation (Bari, Italy); Bass Museum of Art (Miami, USA); Freud Museum (London, UK); Galleria d'Arte Moderna (Bologna, Italy); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville (Paris, France); Brooklyn Museum (New York, USA); Museo di Roma (Rome, Italy); Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain); Arter Foundation (Istanbul, Turkey); British Council Collection (London, UK); Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France); Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna (Turin, Italy); Museum of Contemporary Art (San Diego, USA); the Olbricht Collection (Berlin, Germany); and MONA – Museum of Old and New Art (Hobart, Australia).

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