

EDWARDS

MARK





Dog Watching a Balloon, 40 x 50cm

Mark Edwards

September 2020

CATTO GALLERY

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At a show preview many years ago, a prospective buyer approached Mark Edwards and proceeded to tell him what one of his works was about. He described how the man in the painting had left his workplace in despair, headed out of town and walked into a snowy wood with no idea of where he was, or how he got there. The man in the painting then proceeded to look into the air and scream.

Well, this was all news to Mark. He confesses he has no idea of what his paintings are about – although he is delighted whenever he hears such vivid explanations from his buyers. For Mark, there's no explanation. It's the mystery that matters. He believes there's a good parallel in the work of dramatists such as Pinter, Beckett and Brecht. "Pinter talked about the spaces between words," says Mark. "He said 'don't ask me to explain my work – it's all in the script'. I feel the same way. And I certainly don't feel guilty about not having specific answers."

Although the paintings are full of drama and unresolved tension, Mark often thinks of them in more geometric terms. He likes to explore the 'verticality' of the men and the trees. He values the expanse of white for the relief it brings to the other elements in the composition. And then there's the colour palette. Not much of it, apart from the dramatic red of the balloons and the faintly ominous orange of distant fires.

Mark started creating his 'white wood' paintings just over a decade ago. He'd been painting since the 1970s at his remote home in the Scottish Highlands – mostly depicting the deer stalkers on the nearby Duke of Westminster estate. He'd also earned a living as a book illustrator.

One day in 2007, by chance, Mark happened across a 1950s photo of James Dean on a New York street. In the background was a man in a bowler hat. Inspired, Mark painted a bowler hatted man in a snowy white wood. The painting rang with tension and weirdness. Mark had found his new direction. He bought some hats and overcoats and ventured into the woods with a few friends to try out some compositions.

The white wood paintings have proved extraordinarily popular with collectors. Previous Catto Gallery shows have all been sell-outs. And the work continues to evolve. Mark arranges his unsettling vignettes around a small number of motifs. There's the house – sometimes with a light in a single window, sometimes with no door. There are the ravens, the distant trains, the ominous human shadows and the red balloons. It's no surprise that the 1956 movie *Le Ballon Rouge* left a deep impression on the artist.

More recently Mark has added flames. In the new show, this is exemplified by *Two Strangers Watching A Fire*. It's the perfect Mark Edwards piece. There are two men, but one of them is out of the frame, and appears only as a shadow. The distant fire looks a little frightening, but you wouldn't know it from the quizzical posture of the man. Did he start it? And why is it raging in such a cold environment?

It's a fantastic painting. You can see how much Mark enjoys the creative possibilities unleashed by the glowing red of the flames. To emphasise this, he lays the paint on thick. This is something Mark has started to do more in recent years. It serves to make his world even more immersive. Even if the true meaning of his work remains tantalisingly out of reach.



The Fire Starters, 54 x 73cm



The Family Home, 54 x 73cm

Watching the Party,
80 x 80cm





The 3 O'Clock Train, 30 x 30cm



Listening to a Black Bird, 30 x 30cm



Man Thinking of his Friend 30 x 30cm



Following the Path 30 x 30cm

Watching the Man Watching the Trains 80 x 100cm





Man Finding the Gap
through the Hedge,
60 x 60cm



Reaching the Boundary, 65 x 80cm



The Passing Train,
60 x 60cm





Waiting for Three Others, 60 x 60cm



Deciding Whether to Go, 30 x 30cm



Counting Crows, 40 x 50cm



Discussing What to Do, 40 x 50cm



The First to Arrive, 80 x 100cm



Two Strangers Watching a Fire 38 x 54cm



Deciding What to Do 60 x 60cm



Passing the Coat 40 x 50cm



Two Coats Three Men and a Balloon, 60 x 60cm



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Opening times: 10am - 6pm Mon - Sat • 12.30pm - 6pm Sunday • and by appointment

Exhibition dates: 17th October – 4th November 2020