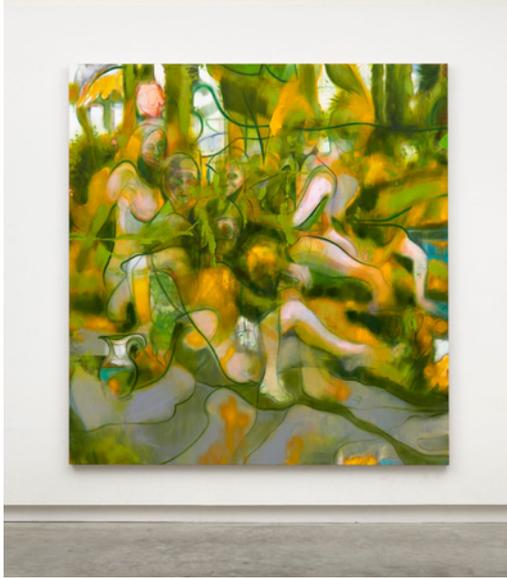


NIGEL COOKE – SPRING IN FIALTA

26th April – 29th June 2019

Opening: Friday, 26th April, 6 – 9 pm



Spring Bathers, 2019
oil on linen
220 x 205 cm / 86½ x 80¾ in

Buchmann Galerie is pleased to present Nigel Cooke's first solo exhibition at the gallery.

Nigel Cooke (born 1973 in Manchester, UK, lives and works in Kent, UK) is one of the most prominent painters of his generation. His large-format tableaus captivate with breath-taking combinations of figurative and abstract elements. Cooke creates contemporary visionary landscapes – epic yet highly personal paintings created from a combination of memory, imagination and intuition. Set in complex spaces lit with strange and sometimes toxic nuances of color, these images are often populated by fragmented or distorted figures – composite beings who move through the space whilst also seeming to merge with it.

Nigel Cooke's approach to painting – as a process, as an object and as an image – questions, rewrites and undermines itself in the process of becoming a finished work. This process serves as much to corrupt the image as to depict it, creating instability on both physical and psychological levels. The works have echoes of many of the gestures and images persistent in art history, but re-organise them with a new kind of tension, becoming a complex equation of gestures, techniques and possibilities that explore the full vocabulary of painting. The almost symphonic range of marks and lines in the works attempts to capture the complexity of lived experience in a psychologically layered whole. In the artist's words, a painting raises a question – "what's the difference between painting and thinking, or painting and looking, or painting and living? In a way, a painting sits on a junction of all those things ... It's almost as if the point where those things meet suggests an image."¹

In the new group of works presented, Nigel Cooke further reduces his compositions, reaching a point of almost complete abstraction. The works reflect his impressions of landscapes he has visited, recreating, for example in *Beach Fires*, the faded recollections of people gathering by the beach at night around several lit fires. The smaller-scale canvases *Borca*, *Isella* and

Fornarelli are highly personal, abstracted and painterly transformations of Cooke's visual memories and emotions from travel in Northern Italy.

The large canvases are characterized by a central positioning of figures, arranged in impressive natural compositions that define the dynamic of the image. Nigel Cooke paints these semi-abstract figures with fine, thread-like lines, giving them a sense of weightlessness and supernatural transparency. However, as they merge into each other, the sum of their appearances and movements ultimately gives the composition a visually monumental quality. The works recall the many instances of the *Bathers* theme in art history, in particular its link with the emergence of abstraction through the work of Cezanne, Picasso and others. In both surface and setting, *Spring Bathers* most vividly connects here, but is presented more as a personal memory than a strict visual reference, unstable, fading in and out. The theme strikes a note of familiarity, prioritising examination of how the work is made over references or narrative.

The works on paper bear witness to Cooke's very process of painting and the formal research that feeds it, where the artist explores variants of light and color in the form of abstract vignettes, each bursting with colour contrasts and dynamic, almost confessional gestures.

Nigel Cooke's attempt to create an evocative and multi-layered language, rich in associations and yet highly subjective, creates works that feed on the artist's and the viewer's memories - at once exquisite and disturbing, familiar and sublime.

Nigel Cooke's work is represented in numerous public collections, including the Tate, London; British Council, London; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Dallas Museum of Art; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

For images or further details of the works in the exhibition feel free to contact the gallery at any time.

¹ Nigel Cooke, Darian Leader in conversation with Nigel Cooke, p. 8, Phaidon Press Ltd.; London 2016