

CANDIDA STEVENS GALLERY

place - displace – Ben Crawford, Charlotte Evans and Veronica Smirnoff

5 – 15th October at Candida Stevens Gallery

8 – 13th November at 4 Cromwell Place, London SW7

Candida Stevens Gallery is pleased to present **place - displace**, a group show exploring the enduring impact of one's roots and the inevitable consequential influence on one's contemplations, as seen in the creative outputs of three artists who now live hundreds of miles from where they were born; **Charlotte Evans**, a British-born artist who first moved to the USA in 2011 and now lives in Toronto, Canada; **Ben Crawford**, an Irish-born artist who emigrated to Queensland, Australia eleven years ago; and **Veronica Smirnoff**, a Russian-born artist who moved to the UK as a teenager.

Stories of the past are deeply influential to the practices of all three artists, whose works are difficult to pinpoint to a particular time in history or location in reality. Instead, mirroring the inevitable feelings of 'otherness' that come from moving to a new environment, there is an otherworldly feel to the scenery presented. From the pink-hued skies of Crawford's world to the loose washes suggestive of land and sea in Smirnoff's panels, and the recurring forms of Evans' saturated landscapes, a dreamlike quality emerges in their works.

In these paintings, images and memories from unconnected places combine to create new visions and open-ended narratives. In Crawford's *Briny Soldiers and Brackish Starfish*, for example, a found image of boys playing on a riverbank merges with the sight of his daughters playing on the beach near their home and the artist's own childhood memories of playing with his brothers. Connecting past and present, Crawford creates a scene that feels both nostalgic and surreal. In Smirnoff's egg tempera panels, Russian icons are reimagined through the combination of art historical references and folklore to move even further into the realm of fantasy.

Figures interact closely with the landscape, reflective of the artists' own efforts to navigate their way through uncharted territories. For Evans, this speaks of the ways in which she seeks to ground herself in her surroundings. Her characters appear as silhouettes and ghostly outlines barely visible on the horizon, or cloaked in patterned textiles that blend with nature, simultaneously emerging and receding from view as they travel through the land they have come to inhabit.

For Crawford, moving to the subtropical rainforest of Queensland was a leap of faith into the unknown. In the evocatively titled *There's a hidden dance tangled in the undergrowth in another time*, we see the artist, quiet and contemplative, enveloped in dense foliage that is at once beautiful and overwhelming. His city trainers, discarded on the orange earth, have been exchanged for sturdy walking boots as he attempts to find his place in the landscape he now calls home.

Viewed together we see that, irrespective of when and why each artist left their homelands, there are ties that continue to bind their experiences of life and new places with their birthplaces. From Smirnoff's innovative uses of a process and medium that is deeply entrenched in Russian art history, to the personal memories and dreams that have influenced Crawford and Evans, there is a to and fro that persists in the artists' minds as they question their identities through time and place.