Yale Center for British Art Premieres First US Exhibition by Turner Prize Nominee George Shaw

George Shaw: A Corner of a Foreign Field spans the last two decades of the artist’s career and features new works

NEW HAVEN, CT (July 31, 2018) – This fall, the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) will debut the first exhibition in the United States dedicated to the work of George Shaw (b. 1966), one of Britain’s leading contemporary painters. George Shaw: A Corner of a Foreign Field, on view from October 4 through December 30, 2018, will feature nearly 70 paintings, 60 drawings, numerous prints, and sketchbook materials spanning Shaw’s career from 1996 to the present, as well as several new works.

In addition to showcasing familiar aspects of Shaw’s painting practice, the exhibition will also highlight the artist’s accomplishment and ambition as a draftsman, introducing visitors to a range of subjects prominent in his graphic work. His drawings dwell on the cultural preoccupations of his youth, including art, film, music, and television, as well as class and politics. Collectively, they reflect the anxieties and aspirations of British culture in the decades of Shaw’s upbringing.

“We are delighted to mount George Shaw’s first solo exhibition in the United States. His work explores the places that define his sense of identity through a self-conscious engagement with the British tradition of landscape art, as well as a reaction against that tradition. His realist landscapes of the housing estates and woodlands of his youth pay homage to the old masters who have shaped his vision but simultaneously subvert our ideas about landscape by uncovering the realities of postmodern Britain from the 1970s to today,” said organizing curator Matthew Hargraves, Chief Curator of Art Collections at the YCBA.

“In A Corner of a Foreign Field, George Shaw’s paintings and drawings are presented in lively dialogue with one another. It is a rich survey of George’s career, and we hope it will reinforce his position as one of the most exciting and ambitious figures within the contemporary art world,” said lead curator Mark Hallett, Director of Studies at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (PMC), the YCBA’s sister institution in London.

Shaw’s work focuses on the Midlands, an area in the United Kingdom anchored by the cities of Birmingham, Derby, and Coventry. His paintings depict scenes from the postwar Tile Hill council estate where he grew up, and from the far more ancient woods surrounding it. Steeped in modern and historic fine art traditions, Shaw’s work alludes
equally to twentieth-century painting and photography, and the legacy of European masters. For example, Titian’s (1490–1576) paintings of Diana and Actaeon directly influenced *The Rude Screen* (2015–16), a work Shaw produced at the National Gallery, London, in 2016 and presented as part of an exhibition culminating his residency. He is also renowned for paintings such as *This Sporting Life* (2009), which testify to his ability to capture the melancholy and poignant aspects of modern British culture.

Rather than using traditional oil or acrylic paints, Shaw prefers thick, sticky, and quick-drying enamel paint—more typically used by model airplane and car enthusiasts. While Humbrol enamel paint denies an artist some of the painterly fluidity granted by other mediums, it imparts a unique metallic sheen and a hard edge appropriate to Shaw’s subject matter. Utilitarian as well as technically unforgiving, the very choice of this medium speaks volumes about social class, the legacy of European art history, and the meaning of materials themselves.

Following its debut at the YCBA this autumn, *A Corner of a Foreign Field* will travel to the Holburne Museum in Bath, UK, where it will be on display from February 8 to May 6, 2019.

**EXHIBITION THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS**

*George Shaw: A Corner of a Foreign Field* is organized in these thematic and loosely chronological sections:

**Recording a World** focuses on Shaw’s early paintings and drawings, produced in the years between 1996, when he began studying at Royal College of Art in London, and 2001, when he presented his first major show, *The New Life*, at the Anthony Wilkinson Gallery. Key works in this section include *No. 57* (1996), the inaugural work of Shaw’s professional career, as well as the series *Scenes from the Passion*—a simultaneously ironic and melancholy retelling of the biblical narrative of Christ’s Passion, in which nondescript scenes of modern life become the counterparts to the landscapes through which Christ traveled before his crucifixion. These Midlands settings also reflect part of the artist himself, as he recalls wandering across the landscape of his youth.

**Landmarks and Memorials** showcases Shaw’s early preoccupation with modern buildings and architecture through a succession of visual pairings that dramatize the artist’s interests in symbols of modern British life: roadside pubs on the outskirts of Tile Hill, the broken doors and rubbish-strewn interiors of a series of garages, and the goalposts that mark a local soccer field.
GEORGE SHAW: A CORNER OF A FOREIGN FIELD
October 4–December 30, 2018

Pathways includes several of Shaw’s depictions of the woodland around Tile Hill. In these works, pathways twist through forests, pass alongside emergent bonfires, and head deep into the undergrowth or skirt the edges of a tower-block—each dramatizing the act of walking as a solitary form of exploration and uncertainty.

Collage, Found Objects, and the Common Culture features an installation of forty-six drawings, produced between 2005 and 2008, which comprise Shaw’s series Spare Time. This section also includes works in other media, such as paintings on denim bags and jackets.

Ash Wednesday presents an in-depth display of works from Shaw’s Ash Wednesday series (2004–5), a lyrical exercise in the painting of light and shadow.

Graffiti and Abstraction introduces a new chapter in Shaw’s practice from 2005 onward. The works in this section maintain the artist’s long-standing interest in chronicling the environment in which he grew up, while also exploring the artistic possibilities of abstraction and graffiti.

The Woodsman focuses on Shaw’s achievements as a painter of English woodlands, exemplified in this series of large-scale charcoal drawings produced between 2008 and 2009. This installation will transform the gallery space into a graphite forest, surrounding the visitor with an astonishing pictorial thicket of boughs and branches.

The End of Time encompasses a series of works depicting sites that had once provided collective bedrock for the community of Tile Hill—social clubs, pubs, care homes, colleges, and places of work. At the turn of the twentieth century, many of these sites were shut down and demolished as the political ideals that had underpinned the creation of the modern council estate found themselves under attack.

Hanging Around presents works from Shaw’s solo exhibition The Last Days of Belief at the Anthony Wilkinson Gallery in 2015, with titles taken from the lyrics of 1980s pop songs and saturated with a sense of time passing. This section also includes paintings from Shaw’s My Back to Nature exhibition, in which he offered an extended response to the themes, iconographies, and narratives of the paintings he encountered during his residency at the National Gallery in 2016.

Pictures of Now offers a selection of Shaw’s most recent works, created between 2016 and 2018, and includes a striking portfolio of new paintings that will debut at the YCBA.
COMMISSIONED FILMS
A series of short films commissioned from the British filmmakers Lily Ford, Jonathan Law, and Jared Schiller explore different aspects of Shaw’s life and creative output. They will be screened at the YCBA throughout the exhibition’s run, offering visitors a dynamic introduction to the artist’s ideas and work, and their continued resonance.

CREDITS
*George Shaw: A Corner of a Foreign Field* is organized by the Yale Center for British Art in collaboration with the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the Holburne Museum in Bath, UK. The lead curator of the exhibition is Mark Hallett, Director of Studies at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, assisted by Alexandra Burston, Research Assistant. The organizing curator at the Center is Matthew Hargraves, Chief Curator of Art Collections.

This exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue of the same title. Edited by Hallett and published in association with Yale University Press, the book features essay contributions from leading scholars, including Catherine Lampert and David Alan Mellor, as well as an interview with Shaw by the British artist Jeremy Deller.

EXHIBITION OPENING EVENT
Tuesday, October 9, 5:30 pm, *George Shaw: A Corner of a Foreign Field*
Curator Mark Hallett will join the artist George Shaw in a conversation at the Yale Center’s Lecture Hall. This program will be live streamed on britishart.yale.edu.

ABOUT GEORGE SHAW
One of Britain’s leading contemporary painters, George Shaw was born in 1966 in Coventry, UK. He received a BA from Sheffield Polytechnic in 1989 and an MA from the Royal College of Art in 1998.

In 2017, he was nominated for the South Bank Sky Arts Award for *My Back to Nature*, the exhibition that culminated his residency at the National Gallery, London, from 2014 to 2016. In 2011, Shaw was nominated for the Turner Prize and received a John Moores 21 prize in 1999.

Shaw’s works are in the collections of the Arts Council Collection, London; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, UK; Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio; Government Art Collection, London; Southampton City Art Gallery, UK; and Tate, London. Solo exhibitions of the artist’s work have been presented at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead; Ikon Gallery, UK; the National Gallery, London; and the South London Gallery, UK.
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October 4–December 30, 2018

ABOUT THE YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART
The Yale Center for British Art is a public art museum and research institute that houses the largest collection of British art outside the United Kingdom. Presented to the university by Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929), the collection reflects the development of British art and culture from the Elizabethan period onward. The Center’s collections include more than 2,000 paintings, 250 sculptures, 20,000 drawings and watercolors, 6,000 photographs, 40,000 prints, and 35,000 rare books and manuscripts. More than 40,000 volumes supporting research in British art and related fields are available in the Center’s Reference Library. In May 2016, the Center reopened to the public following the completion of a multiyear project to conserve its iconic Louis I. Kahn building.

Visit the Center online at britishart.yale.edu, and connect on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat @yalebritishart. #GeorgeShaw

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