Jake Attree
The City, the Gardens and the People
Front cover:
At the City’s Edge
Oil on board, 2013
Cat. 43
Jake Attree

The City, the Gardens and the People

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Extensive View of York
Oil on 2 panels  183x386cm  2006
Cat. 54
The City, the Gardens and the People, which we proudly present in association with Messum’s of Cork Street, marks the return of renowned painter Jake Attree to the New School House Gallery after the success of his 2011 solo show Landscapes for Figures. The majority of the works in The City, the Gardens and the People centre on interpretations of York, the city of Attree’s birth, and the exhibition consists almost entirely of new work created in 2012-3.

Attree concedes that, in common with other artists, he is prone to a sense of ‘linear progress’: ‘Artists always want to show their latest work in the hope that their latest work is their best work - which of course is nonsense: you should just make work and history will decide if it’s of any value – or not!’

The ‘non-linear’ element in this exhibition – the work that history has decided is definitely of value - is Attree’s Extensive View of York, a show-stopping, two-panel panorama of the city. Created in 2006, this is a magnificent 6ft by 12ft oil painting that looks towards the Minster from the Bar Walls. Painted just yards from the wall on which it hangs now in the gallery, the painting is dominated by the red roofs and red brick of residential Aldwark, which gradually lead the eye up towards the shimmering, hazy cathedral.

Throughout his career, Jake Attree has returned again and again to draw and paint the ancient city where he grew up. Repeated observations combine with his inner familiarity with York’s landscape from stored childhood memories, so that the same vantage point can yield a seemingly endless...
series of depictions. Attree jokes about these ‘obsessions’ – looking down from the central tower of the Minster, the city from the Bar Walls, Baile Hill as both subject and vantage point – but it seems clear that this process of repeated observation and reinterpretation is his own, Proustian attempt at recapturing a truth from childhood. As Barbara Hepworth observed: ‘What we want to say is formed in childhood, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to express it.’

That said, one cannot stress enough the importance of drawing and real-life observation in Attree’s work. Drawing is at the heart of all he does. Even his most abstract oil paintings have their origins in drawing, and it is by anchoring his practice in this way that Attree manages to avoid the charge of sentimentality. There is nothing sentimental in his depictions of Baile Hill, despite its being a favourite childhood haunt: his depictions are deeply rooted in observation.
‘If I feel that the painting’s becoming nothing more than an aesthetic exercise and I’m just making patterns, I will go back and refer to the external world; if I feel that the paintings are being bullied by what I’ve observed in the external world, I will put the drawings aside and just paint. What I’m after is a balance between that which is an object in its own right, the painting, and the power of the painting to be a representation of something, to be inspired by something, to be a reinvention of something that I have seen empirically.’

Throughout his career, Attree has been captivated by people moving through cities – York, Leeds, Bradford, Hartlepool, New York have all yielded inspiration for studies of crowds. ‘I find the idea of crowds moving through built environments, especially ancient ones like York, both moving and inspiring. There’s an intensity embedded in everyone walking down the street because of the density and richness of life’s experiences. People going about their daily work in York have the same gravitas as an historical painting’.

Consequently, The City, the Gardens and the People reflects the ordinary life of the city in street scenes of Coney Street and Fossgate, views of St Michael le Belfrey and St Margaret’s Church, and graphite drawings of the gardens around the New School House Gallery. In these, as in all the exhibition’s works, Attree displays an attentiveness to the moment alongside an extensive vocabulary of line and a profoundly embedded sense of place.

Robert Teed & Paula Jackson
Co-Directors
The New School House Gallery
September 2013
Looking Across the City from the Bar Walls
Oil on board  60x70cm  2013
Cat. 50
York Trees and Roofs Seen from the City Walls
Oil on board  60x50cm  2013
Cat. 52
York Trees and Buildings Seen From a Height
Oil on panel  60x45cm  2013
Cat. 51
Landscape in Ochre and Grey
Oil on board  40x35cm  2013
Cat. 10
At the City’s Edge
Oil on board  60x60cm  2013
Cat. 43
Landscape at the Edge of a City
Oil on panel  120x120cm  2013
Cat. 44
The Ruins of St Mary's Abbey I
Oil pastel 43x63cm 2013
Cat. 25
The Ruins of St Mary’s Abbey 2
Oil pastel  43x63cm  2013
Cat. 26
The Ruins of St Mary’s Abbey 3
Oil pastel  43x63cm  2013
Cat. 27
Figures Passing St Michael le Belfry
Oil on panel  60x60cm  2013
Cat. 47
Looking up Fossgate and Across Pavement
Oil on panel  90x40cm  2013
Cat. 48
St Margaret’s Church – the York Centre for Early Music from the City Walls – Study
Oil on board  60x70cm  2013
Cat. 50
The Minster Seen from the Mansion House Roof
Oil pastel  60x75cm  2013
Cat. 32
The Blue Hill
Oil Pastel  60x60cm  2012
Cat. 38
Figures on Coney Street – Study
Oil on Panel  41x51cm  2013
Cat. 18
Figures on Coney Street, Saturday Afternoon – Study
Oil on Panel  41x51cm  2013
Cat. 19
Looking Across the City from a Wooded Hill
Oil Pastel  55x62cm  2012
Cat. 33
View Across a City, Evening
Oil Pastel  55x62cm  2012
Cat. 34
River Landscape, Autumn
Oil Pastel  55x62cm  2012
Cat. 35
View from a Wooded Hill
Oil Pastel  55x62cm  2012
Cat. 36
Figures on Coney Street, Early Evening
Oil Pastel  55x62cm  2013
Cat. 40
Coney Street, Saturday Afternoon
Oil Pastel  55x62cm  2013
Cat. 41
Coney Street, Afternoon
Oil Pastel  62x55cm  2013
Cat. 42
Baile Hill 1
Oil pastel  73x44cm  2013
Cat. 55
Baile Hill 2
Oil pastel  73x44cm  2013
Cat. 56
Red Tide
Oil on board  16x15cm  2013
Cat. 01
Red Tide - Red Accent
Oil on board  16x15cm  2013
Cat. 06
Jumping Hearts
Oil on board  16x20cm  2013
Cat. 02
Evening Comes
Oil on board  20x26cm  2013
Cat. 03
Ochre Landscape with Grey Road
Oil on board  25x30cm  2013
Cat. 04
Orange Accent
Oil on board  17×21cm  2013
Cat. 05
Ochre and Brown Landscape
Oil on board  18x27cm  2013
Cat. 07
Small View from a Hill
Oil on board  21x26cm  2013
Cat. 08
Pale Landscape with Trees
Oil on board  26×30cm  2013
Cat. 09
Extensive View of Leeds from Richmond Hill
Ink on Paper  24x19cm  2012
Cat. 11
Richmond Hill, Leeds, Evening
Ink on Paper  24x19cm  2012
Cat. 12
The Path Home from School
Ink on Paper  24x19cm  2012
Cat. 13
Roses Mill, Leeds
Ink on Paper  24x19cm  2012
Cat. 14
Looking Towards Cross Green, Leeds
Ink on Paper 24x19cm 2012
Cat. 15
St Saviour’s, Richmond Hill, Leeds – Study
Acrylic on Paper  26x16cm  2012
Cat. 16
St Saviour's, Leeds (Grey Day) – Study
Acrylic on Paper  21x29cm  2012
Cat. 17
Bridge Over the Ship Canal at Leeds
Graphite on Paper  54x67cm  2013
Cat. 21
Ancient Tree in the Grounds of St Ives, Bingley
Graphite on Paper  54x67cm  2013
Cat. 22
Sycamore Trees in the Grounds of Embleton Church, Northumberland
Graphite on Paper  54x67cm  2013
Cat. 23
Ash Tree and Conifer at Dunstan, Northumberland
Graphite on Paper  54x67cm  2013
Cat. 24
Lynne's Garden in Summer
Graphite on Paper  54x73cm  2013
Cat. 28
Ash Trees from the Cottage Garden, Northumberland
Graphite on Paper  54x73cm  2013
Cat. 29
The Gallery, the Workshop and the Restaurant
Graphite on Paper  54x73cm  2013
Cat. 31