

Press Release

**Nigel Cooke**  
*Night Crossing*

30 April – 29 May, 2010

Private view Thursday 29 April, 6-8pm

Stuart Shave/Modern Art are delighted to announce a solo exhibition of new work by the British painter Nigel Cooke, *Night Crossing*. This is Cooke's fourth solo exhibition with Modern Art.

Nigel Cooke's paintings construct a dark and melancholic world; a deeply psychologised landscape filled with an atmosphere that articulates the trauma of creative dereliction. At its core, Cooke's work is an allegorical conception of creativity and production, played out in a world populated by artists and philosophers. This is a place haunted by vagrant and degenerate martyrs who have caved-in to a parody of existentialism and committed themselves to experience over abstractions of thought. These characters abandon reason, wilfully and foolishly throwing themselves headlong into the unseen and unknown.

In this new exhibition *Night Crossing*, Nigel Cooke's dramatic centrepiece is the monumental triptych *Departure*. Describing a voyage of discovery, *Departure* is set amidst the artist's re-reading of Max Beckmann's triptych of the same title (1933-1935). Conceived in a climate of fear, the central image of Beckmann's work culminates in a belief in redemption and metaphysical release from worldly horror. Turned inside out, it is here that the action of Nigel Cooke's *Departure* takes place. Where Beckmann's characters stand – departed – in a small boat on the calm open sea, Cooke's characters are cast of their own volition into the unpredictable yet inevitable turmoil of a devastating storm, enduring a grave reckoning against nature. Having embarked upon an ill-fated trip that is to mark the triumph of experience over thought, Cooke's protagonists are at the same time the subjects of existential crisis and an absence of redemption. Hubris is destructively confronted by the indifference of the world, and philosophy offers little in the way of consolation.

The abjection that Cooke's characters evince from their circumstances manifests as a kind of courage: a mindless valour in the face of doubt. In the tradition of the fool drawn from Rousseau, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche and Sartre, Cooke's characters play out acts of failure, ignorance and thoughtlessness. These are states of potential rather than straightforward negatives. Throughout all Cooke's work, foolish characterisation embodies a ridiculing of the vanities of artistic production, as well as celebrating the creative capacity for intellectual renewal, visionary thought and self-criticism.

Yet with all the uncertainty and incapacity that Cooke describes in his paintings, their coming to be is the result of his own pursuit of purpose and of painting. He demonstrates a technical faculty and deftness of painterly touch that is at complete odds with the pathetic, hackneyed daubs of his subjects. Cooke's restless intellect has always fed continuous progression. Recent years have seen a subtle transformation of the pictorial content of his paintings as portraits of solitary figures succeed their ghostly, even absent, predecessors.

Cooke's new series of full length portraits dictate a new and as yet unseen set of circumstances in which Cooke's thickly bearded heroes of experience immerse themselves in the moment, isolated within a nightclub of some sort. Theirs too is a world of darkness and inescapable solitude, but bluntly contrasted with the palpable dejection and misery of *Departure*. Their moment is a euphoric peak, captured in full steam on a trip of a different kind. These characters loom large, painters painted in desperate, inglorious isolation: archetypes of creative martyrdom beset by unrelenting dystrophy.

Nigel Cooke was born in Manchester in 1973 and lives and works in London. Cooke was awarded a PhD in Fine Art from Goldsmith's College, London, in 2004, and MA Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London, in 1997. Nigel Cooke has been the subject of solo museum shows at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2007), The Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth (2006), Art Now, Tate Britain (2004), and South London Gallery, London (2006). Paintings by Nigel Cooke are held amongst the most esteemed international collections, including 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 Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, and Sammlung Goetz, Munich. Nigel Cooke's work is currently on display in the exhibition *Skin Fruit*, curated by Jeff Koons, at the New Museum, New York. A new monograph featuring essays by Michael Bracewell and Martin Herbert is to be published by Walther König in late 2010.