

Bob & Roberta Smith
The Storm
8 March – 17 April 2025

Opening Saturday 8 March 2 – 6 pm

Anthony Wilkinson Gallery is pleased to present *The Storm* by Rob and Roberta Smith – storms, birds and words.

The paintings of storms are uncharacteristically images inspired by storms on the border between France and England, seen from Ramsgate looking towards Calais. Bob and Roberta Smith started in 2022 making watercolours of this view and exchanging them for donations to life saving charities. The image of the channel was once a playground and an entry point to Europe, but the perception of the channel has changed over the past decade. It's now seen as a border and a barrier; it's polluted and it's tragically a place where people die trying to cross to the UK. The paintings of storms, oil on found wood material, are images of mental states and uncertainty. Moody and expressive, they are partly painted from life and partly improvised from memory. Each work has its own sculpture of a bird dedicated to it. The birds, sea gulls or crows, made from scraps of wood and old piano parts, are seen as a point of entry to the paintings. The birds are champions and perhaps defenders of the spirit of the paintings. The viewer is invited to imagine that the seagulls or crows have flown out of the paintings and into the gallery space, waiting to fly back again into the storm.

More typical of Bob and Roberta Smith's output are his text works. For this exhibition he is presenting works from the series *The Word Observatory* – hexagonal paintings that are portraits of words. He attempts to paint the character of a word, of how each word might look in a particular light and how they might feel different in other contexts: *Hope*, *Storm*, *Imaginative*, *Together*... The composer Eric Satie once claimed to have made a contraption for looking at musical notes. For instance, Satie said the B flat was the most vile looking creature. The word portraits were originally shown in the exhibition *The Word Observatory* at Von Barth Gallery, Copenhagen in 2022.

In 1996, Anthony Wilkinson invited Bob and Roberta Smith to create a happening at the Serpentine Lake in London, where he made concrete boats and invited friends and art lovers to attempt to float them on the water. The performative aspect of this happening, entitled *Flawed*, established the idea that art could exist in the act of play and the viewers interacting with artworks. *Flawed* led Nicolas Bourriaud to invite Bob and Roberta Smith to take part in the significant exhibition *Altermodern* at Tate Britain in 2009 and to do a retrospective at MO.CO. Panacée in Montpellier in 2018, both exploring ideas about relational art. For *The Storm*, both rooms encourage the audience to participate and play with the birds and the words.

Bob and Roberta Smith (1963) is actually one man – an artist, writer, art educator, curator and musician. He used to collaborate with his sister, but she retrained to become a group psychiatric specialist. Bob and Roberta Smith is well known for his use of words painted on banners and boards made into signs. His text works can also appear in newspapers or sung in songs as statements about art and free expression. In 2011, he wrote *Letter to Michael Gove* to the UK Secretary of State for Education reprimanding him for the “destruction of Britain's ability to draw, design and sing” and later directly confronted Gove by standing against him as candidate for MP. Bob and Roberta Smith collaborated in the early 1990's with other artist musicians with his band The Apathy Band and hosts a weekly radio show from his studio, *Make Your Own Damn Music* radio show on Resonance FM. He's practice has influenced generations of teachers and students of arts subjects to embrace the idea that the arts are a human right, and he believes that *all should be art schools*. Bob and Roberta Smith has exhibited at a number of museums including MoMA PS1, Tate Britain-, Modern- and Liverpool, Royal Academy of Arts London, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art Gateshead, The New Art Gallery Walsall and The Harris Museum Preston. Bob and Roberta Smith is represented in several collections in Europe and the US. In 2013 he was elected as a RA and 2017 awarded an OBE.

Bob and Roberta Smith's exhibition *The Thamesmead codex* at Tate Modern has been extended until January 2026.