

# ANTHONY REYNOLDS GALLERY

COLLABORATION #6

**RICHARD BILLINGHAM : LANDSCAPE 2001-2016**

**SPAZIO 22 MILAN**

**OPENING 28 SEPTEMBER**



*Good landscape art is about a condition, an attitude ... a state of mind".(RB)*

The name Richard Billingham is forever associated with the extraordinary series of photographs of his own family which he took for a period of a few years, from 1990. Just 19 years old and passionately dedicated to the idea of being a painter, he started to take these photographs as source material for expressionist studies of his father, Ray, a man sustained in a lack and luckless life by little more than vast quantities of home-made alcohol. But Billingham soon realised that the photographs themselves were the work and the combination of environment, intimacy and an exceptional aesthetic awareness resulted in hundreds of the now internationally celebrated images of Ray, Liz, brother Jason and dogs, cats, fish and rats, images that have a power and a real beauty that is exceptional and unique. Within a few years, Billingham was exhibiting in galleries and institutions in Europe, the Americas and the Far East and collectors and museums were avidly acquiring his work. Once the shows began, however, Billingham turned the focus off his family.

First he stepped outside and photographed the suburban environment of Cradley Heath, a stage set peopled only by parked cars, silent. He then turned to animals, animals in captivity, animals that he remembered from earliest childhood in the local zoo; animals restricted in an unfamiliar environment stressed and engaged in perpetual repetitive actions. Billingham travelled far and wide making videos and large-scale photographs of these oppressed creatures. Many of the videos are almost unbearable to watch. Meanwhile Billingham kept returning to the landscape. His own restrictive and chaotic domestic upbringing had a perhaps inevitable parallel in a profound relationship with nature in all its moods and manifestations. Billingham is a weatherman, a bird watcher, an acute observer of the teeming life in the hedgerows, a botanist. Of an oak tree he writes:

*"Every Spring the oak blooms. The invisible pollen from the catkins is distributed each year by the wind but acorns drop within only a few yards of the parent and always get eaten by the deer or the commoner browsers. Animals gather beneath its shade; beetle larvae honeycomb the bark and other invertebrates inhabit the crevices. Pollarding has created a micro-habitat for tiny, semi-amphibian organisms with the water in the hollows forming miniature ponds when it rains";*

And, on an attempt to capture the passing of a particular light over the land, like a hunter stalking his prey,

*'I lie in wait for a while then try again when it comes back but I still cannot catch it. It is now nearly properly dark though there is no moon. I don't want to get too close to the light a hundred metres across the beach. I decide to follow the static, winding river back up.. The still bodies of clear water mirror the dim-white negative spaces above within black land patches. Stepping into the water would be like stepping into the sky'*

Every one of these images is the result of a moment of recognition, scenes experienced for the first time, but with a certain inevitability. Wherever they come from they speak of a personal relationship every bit as real as those in the family flat in the Black Country.

*'The best landscape photography comes from inside the artist, from ideas, emotions and attitudes projected onto the landscape and recorded with the camera'*

There are images from the south downs of Sussex, the huge skies of Norfolk, Constable's Essex, his home land of Gower in Wales; images from England, Wales, Greece, Ireland, Ethiopia, Pakistan. Landscapes large and very small, close and far, wet and dry, calm and angry. We can only present a small selection here but each image has companions and though hard to choose, those selected are amongst the very best. And not just the best of Billingham but amongst the best images in a great tradition of *affaires* with the landscape from the awe of Caspar David Friedrich to the forensic celebrations of the familiar by Constable.

This exhibition is one of a series for both galleries. Anthony Reynolds Gallery has now established a model of nomadic collaborations, with no proprietary fixed space. This is the sixth exhibition in the programme. The next three projects will take place in Berlin, Amsterdam and London. The gallery will continue to participate in art fairs where appropriate, always presenting the work of one artist or one theme and treating the art fair booth as another gallery. Spazio 22, incorporating both FL GALLERY and Galleria PACK has maintained an imaginative series of guest gallery shows alongside the spaces they programme on a regular basis. Federico Luger has had a long-term interest in the work of Richard Billingham and we were delighted to accept his invitation to propose an exhibition. We look forward to welcoming our friends and colleagues from Milan and the many people who have supported and acquired Billingham's work in the past.

FOR IMAGES AND FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY

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