

LandEscape meets

# James Johnson-Perkins

lives and works in the UK and China

James Johnson-Perkins is an acclaimed British award-winning artist whom currently lives and works in the UK and China. Johnson-Perkins has exhibited in leading venues in Asia, North America and Europe, including: *Toyota Museum of Modern Art, Toyota City, Japan, The Art Museum of Nanjing University of the Arts, Nanjing, China, The Arts Student League, New York, USA, Ars Electronica Centre, Linz, Austria, The Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, Scotland and The National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Moscow, Russia.*

*He Recently won the Mediterranean Contemporary Art Prize, President's Award and the Bath Open Prize, People's Choice Award. He was the Runner up for the Alpine Fellowship, Visual Arts Prize and he was an award winner for the Art Observatory Digital Art Program, Ukraine/UK. He was also a finalist for the 'Airland 4.0 | Nature, Technology, Energy' Competition and he was shortlisted for the Passpartout Photo Prize, Italy.*

In 2021 Johnson-Perkins was involved with two digital residencies at: *The Belgrave Arts Studio, Serbia and Correlation Contemporary, Peru*; and his work was also recently shown at: *The Rotterdam Photo Festival, Holland, Florence Contemporary Gallery, Italy, Austral Festival Internacional de Performance Art de Buenos Aires, Argentina, The International Forum of Performance Art, Drama, Greece, at Ars Electronica with .ART Gallery x VR-All-Ar, Linz, Austria and at Boundaries, Bekarei Video Art Space, Berlin, Germany* and he was also featured in *BOSS Magazine, Beijing, China, Al-Tiba9 Online Contemporary Art Magazine, Barcelona, Spain and Aerogramme, New York, USA.*

An interview by **Josh Ryder**, curator  
and **Melissa C. Hilborn**, curator  
[landscape@europe.com](mailto:landscape@europe.com)

Welcome to LandEscape. Before starting to elaborate about your artistic production, we would like to invite our readers to visit <http://www.johnson-perkins.co.uk> in order to get a wider idea about your artistic production, and we would like to start this

interview with a couple of questions about your background. You have a particularly solid formal training: you graduated with a Master's Degree in Fine Arts from the Northumbria University and you later nurtured your education with a PhD, that you are currently pursuing at the Lancaster University. How did these formative years influence your evolution as an artist? Moreover, how does your cultural substratum





## Brightonian

**due to living in China and in the United Kingdom address the direction of your current artistic research?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** I studied in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, at Northumbria University in the UK, during the 2000's. This place had a great DIY ethic, that was much less influenced by money, than say London or New York and this period had a very influential effect on my ideals and ideas. During this time, I met with the late Gustav Metzger (Auto-Destructive Artist), and he turned me on to the Social and Political Art, and also at this time, I guess I clocked on to the fact, that there are many different ways

to make and think about Art that aren't at all art-market centred. Also, in Newcastle I met Robin Klassnik (Matts Gallery), and I became interested in the idea of galleries as working/Installation spaces.

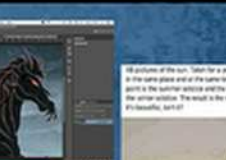
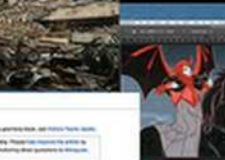
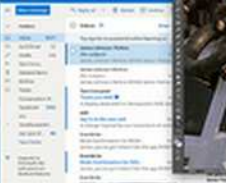
The North-East at this time was an exciting and bright place to be, and In 2007, I had an Exhibition alongside one of the last standing Fluxus Artist's Alison Knowles, at the legendary Waygood Gallery, and I also met with the extraordinary free-thinker, and Fluxus mega-brain Alan Bowman, and definitely, I think, all of these experiences and meetings with these creative kindred spirits were hugely influential. Consequently,

with this particular Fluxus exhibition, it led to me to doing a series of Artist Residencies in Venice, at the Fluxus Gallery and Archive, *The Emily Harvey Foundation*, which ultimately became a kind of creative home and focal point in my development as an artist

Since 2011, I have lived in different places, in Oman, Russia and now China, which are all places that have all also affected me and my art practice in various interesting ways. I have had some great experiences in China too, such as, when I worked with the Icelandic artist Sigurdur Gudmundsson's (The Chinese European Art Centre) Gallery, and yes, more recently, I have been working

on my *Creative Writing* PHD at Lancaster University, and this has allowed me to explore ideas about *Collaged Narratives*, and during this in-depth study, I have created a series of short stories, based on this continued research and on my artwork as well.

**The body of works that we have selected for this special edition of *LandE*scape —and that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article — has at once captured our attention for their unique chromatic syntax, as well as for the way they challenge the viewers to elaborate personal interpretations. Would**



Daily What  
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INDONESIA

14:05 Last contact

14:36 Departed Jakarta

Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737 passenger plane feared to have crashed in Indonesia

The New York Times

Sun  
ILLEGALS HAVE LANDED



**The Great Battle, detail**

**you tell us something about your usual setup? In particular, how important is intuition in your creative process?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** I think Intuition is important, Yes, especially at the beginning of my process Here, I often think and muse, for a considerable time, on issues which are prescient to me, and suit various grand narrative e.g., Religion, Ethics etc... or will contemplate something societal or theoretical, and really, ultimately, I like to explore memories through a making process.

This process with the Gigapan works takes many years, and the things I add, are often instinctual and Intuitive as well. With some of these works, I have worked on them for ten years or more.

Also, I would say, in the beginning these artworks also kind of present themselves to me, and also the landscapes themselves e.g., Times Square, New York or A View from the Rialto Bridge, Venice, present a particular starting point, that also brings with it, its own ideas.

**You often work with a large canvass, that provides your spectatorship with such an immersive visual experience: how do the dimensions of your pieces affect your workflow?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** Yes, they are very huge and immersive pieces that's true, and people will often spend half an hour or more looking at them, or longer, and I enjoy this fact very much. You know, we live in this fast information world now, with mobile phones etc. that's very transitory, and people often

only look at images for barely a few seconds. The Photographer Jamie House said regarding my work. 'You're surrounded by a sea of images and they're fascinating, you know I can spend hours looking at one of your works and not fully understand them, because they have so many hundreds and thousands of characters.' Also, everyone interprets and generates their own narratives from looking these works.

**We have really appreciated the way you draw inspiration from memories and**









### The Assembly of the Gods

**reproduce reality, but to create a reality of the same intensity." Would you tell us something about the role of symbols and references to mainstream culture in order to achieve such brilliant results?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** Thank you for saying that. The symbols and references in my work, relate to the themes of the different Gigatages themselves, e.g. There are religious objects scattered around The Assembly of the Gods, and there are 80's Vinyl Records, 8-bit computers and children's snacks flying around The Great Battle, which relate to nostalgia and memory. All of these works re-imagine a different type of reality I guess, that has its own epic intensity. I do like this Giacometti quote and it's interesting that you relate it to my work, as I have

always enjoyed looking at the elongated haunted visions of Giacometti. I particularly love his drawings, and the energy generated by his frantic lines and his unique spatial awareness

**The Assembly of The Gods is an extremely stimulating work that blurs the boundaries between such a wide variety of cultural heritages: how do references to mythology fuel your creative process?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** Thanks again for your kind comments. In this work I am interested in a Taxonomy of Religiousness. In Goddesses and Gods from all times and places. So in the creation this work, I could be able to see many commonalities and differences between different areas and

time periods, and this helped me to understand the visual history of this particular subject very well. What amazed me, is there are so many sacred images and hundreds and hundreds of different deities and many that I wasn't always able to find images of. So, I guess each work is a mini-research project in itself and I am learning about lots of different aspect about myself and these different topics and themes, that the works are about, and, I guess, this research is in itself a kind of *fuel* that drives this work along as well.

**We definitely love the way your works create visual links to history and reality, unveiling the connection ancient cultural heritage — with reminders of Géricault, Raphael and Canaletto — and references to**

**contemporary popular culture: how do you consider the relationship between Past and Present playing within your artistic research? In particular, do you aim to create a bridge between Tradition and Contemporariness?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** Yes, I supposed this is exactly what I am trying to do. Both visually and now with storytelling and creative writing. To use an interesting metaphor, I'm trying to weave together many different aspects of a giant/vast Indra's net. NOTE: In Hindu cosmology, "Indra's net" is used to describe the interconnectedness of the universe.

**Rich of references to different modern and historical figures in renowned sites and civic**







The Assembly of the Gods, detail

squares, your work has more than one story to tell, and we dare say that *the works emerge from the context*, providing the spectatorship with freedom to realize their own perception: how important is for you to trigger the viewers' imagination in order to address them to elaborate *personal interpretations*? In particular, how open would you like your works to be understood?

**James Johnson-Perkins:** I would like my works to be understood, exactly as different personal interpretations around shared grand themes. I think as an artist we can only control interpretation so much, such as, in my case I can control things like the themes and the places I work with. By the way, it was interesting when I began to show my work in China, because these works mean something different in a Chinese context compared to let's say to a UK one, because so many of the references I use come from a UK person's memory. Therefore, in say *The Great Battle*, the Chinese audiences didn't understand all the references as I did/do. So meaning is often culturally specific as well.

**You are an acclaimed and award-winning artist, and we would like to invite our readers to follow your Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/jjpartist>. Over the years you have exhibited in leading venues in Asia, North America and Europe, including your participation to the prestigious Venice Biennale: how do you consider the nature of your relationship with your audience?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** Yes, I have developed an international reputation, and

this question about my relationship with an audience is always an interesting one. I guess as an audience member too, I am mostly interested in art that: *provokes, excites and engages*. So, these are the same responses I would like from the audiences of my work as well, but also, primarily with my work I'm also very interested in triggering memories and creating nostalgic reactions in audiences.

**We have really appreciated the multifaceted nature of your artistic research and before leaving this stimulating conversation we would like to thank you for chatting with us and for sharing your thoughts, James. What projects are you currently working on, and what are some of the ideas that you hope to explore in the future?**

**James Johnson-Perkins:** Sure, there are a few exhibitions that I am currently involved with. One with Tsinghua University, Beijing at the Sky Art Centre, Qingdao, China, and I am in a video show at The Czigon Institute of Contemporary Art (CICA), in South Korea. I was also recently showing at the XL Edition of the Rotterdam Photo Festival, Holland. As well as this, I have started to become interested in Virtual Reality and so I have been made a series of VR galleries, which you can experience on my website, and I also have a series of LEGO ROBOT NFT's coming out which will be available to buy soon.

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