

## **Lee Simmonds *Into Yonderland* at Kristin Hjellegjerde**

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On display at Kristin Hjellegjerde until October 31<sup>st</sup> as part of his first solo show *Into Yonderland*, Lee Simmonds' work is dreamlike and engrossing.

Despite their colourful palette, Simmonds' paintings have an immersive solemnity that makes them hard to pull away from. While looking at 'Element: Water' I'm reminded of Victorian social commentary paintings which strike the same emotional discord as Simmonds' figurative work.

Graduating from The Ruskin in 2019, the young artist has already mastered a signature combination of technical proficiency and compelling abstraction; we are under no illusion that Lee Simmonds is a brilliantly accomplished painter.

Simmonds' paint is built up subtly in layers, revealing complex colour-combinations where the top layers are applied more thinly. Near-neon shades flash through Simmonds' palette, bringing his scenes a fantastical vitality. The artist pairs bold pattern and murky block colours with more detailed figures to create an engaging visual texture. The canvases in the exhibition are mainly large, drawing in the viewer to Simmonds' worlds. These larger canvases serve to make smaller works, like *Schtum*, feel even more intimate.

The framing of the pieces was impeccable. The floater frames were painted to match the tone of their piece, adding to the impact of the paintings, rather than (as is often the case) drawing the viewers' attention to the sometimes-jarring boundary between the gallery wall and an artist's painted reality. By not using glass in the framing, we are able to properly appreciate each piece's varied surface.

The exhibition was well curated within the space, and the red statement wall was used wisely to create contrast within the space and, on a shallower note, something eminently Instagrammable. Unfortunately I went to KH's London Bridge gallery in the pouring rain and in the middle of their renovations, meaning Simmonds' gorgeous works were hung in a what was essentially a gloomy conservatory. I'm rarely in favour of a white-cube gallery hang, but I think the paintings of *Into Yonderland* could have done with being entirely uninterrupted by anything external to their bewitching scenes. They deserve full focus.

*Into Yonderland* is a must-see and is an incredibly impressive, punchy debut solo show from Lee Simmonds, who will only go from strength to strength.