

CONNAUGHT BROWN

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Shani Rhys James
Hunan-ynysu : Self Island

9 June – 1 July 2021



Shani Rhys James, *Before Lockdown*, 2019, Oil on linen, 91.5 x 122 cm

Connaught Brown is delighted to present *Hunan-ynysu : Self Island*, an exhibition by the acclaimed Welsh artist Shani Rhys James. In her arresting still lifes, portraits and interiors Rhys James examines her own image and relationships to explore the transience of being. Created over the past year during the Covid filled months, this new body of work reflects upon the challenges and realisations we have been confronted with, as both individuals and a society.

The phrase ‘Hunan-ynysu’ - meaning self-island or isolation in Welsh – for Rhys James is a reflection of the physical and emotional distance that has transformed lives. In the paintings *Bed* and *Figure in Orange* she captures the psychological effects of emotional and physical solitude, becoming a ‘Self Island’ fearful of human connection and engagement. The powerful female figures call in question the duality of the heightened domestic pressures upon women coupled with a new-found closeness within families. Often turning to history and literature, Rhys James takes inspiration from Boccaccio’s 1353 *The Decameron* in which a group of men and women flee a plague-ridden Florence; moved by the tragedy, *Isabella* and *Nostalgia III* reference a 21st century plague.

In her still lifes Rhys James presents a reprieve from the darkness and solitude, with the flowers providing an explosion of colour and positivity. Rhys James juxtaposes the fragility of human life with that of the flowers, while simultaneously referencing a new awareness and appreciation of nature. Blooming from the canvas, the irises, lilies and daffodils symbolise re-birth and the healing power of nature after a period of anguish.

Following a retrospective at Charleston Trust in Sussex in 2020, *Hunan-ynysu : Self Island* is Rhys James' fifth solo exhibition at Connaught Brown. Rhys James has been awarded numerous prizes including the famed Jerwood prize in 2003, the National Portrait Award, Mostyn Open, Hunting Prize, the Gold Medal at the National Eisteddfod of Wales and an MBE for services to Welsh art. Rhys James has also been the focus of many documentaries, including the 2014 BBC show *What Do Artists Do All Day* and earlier this year *The Story of Welsh Art* also on BBC.



Rhys James, *Black Bird*, 2020, Oil on linen
183 x 183 cm



Rhys James, *Self Isolation I*, 2020, Oil on linen
91.5 x 91.5 cm



Rhys James, *Lilies*, 2021, Oil on gesso panel
20.5 x 15 cm



Rhys James, *Bed*, 2021, Oil on linen, 180 x 180 cm

CONNAUGHT BROWN Pic:

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