

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Left to right: Tony Bevan, *Epistrophy Orange Red* (PC2217), 2022, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas 57.5 x 64 cm. (22 5/8 x 25 1/4 in.)
Tony Bevan, *Head* (PC212), 2021, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 105.5 x 116 cm. (41 1/2 x 45 5/8 in.)

TONY BEVAN *EPISTROPHIES AND HEADS*

23 November 2023 – 1 March 2024

Private View: Wednesday, 22 November, 6.30-8PM (GMT)

Ben Brown Fine Arts presents *Epistrophies and Heads*, an exhibition of recent paintings by British artist Tony Bevan, at our London gallery. This will be Bevan's twelfth exhibition with the gallery and marks the second part of our comprehensive exhibition, following the earlier works from this series on view at our Hong Kong gallery through September to November 2023. The exhibition showcases Bevan's latest series, *Epistrophies*, in which the artist explores the rhythmic, abstract, infinite possibilities inspired by a singular motif, a tree, which he encountered near his home over many winters. These works will be presented alongside Bevan's *Heads* paintings, with which he has taken on a looser, more abstract approach as this series progresses. Exhibited together, the repetitive forms and complex structures of these works offer a meditation and myriad associations to the viewer, suggestive of the human form and its intricate internal, external and psychological systems.

Over the last fifty years, Bevan has emerged as one of Britain's foremost figurative painters. Bevan's work has explored a cohesive yet dynamic evolution of thematic investigations. His works often feature trees, landscapes, architectural constructions and heads. The *Epistrophies* series focuses on the profoundly rhythmic, anthropomorphic, and expressive characteristics of a leafless tree that Bevan closely studied near his home throughout several seasons. Returning to his studio to work from memory, he would transmute the emotions and impressions exuded by the tree into endless iterations. Adopting a term commonly associated with poetry, rhetoric and rhythm, each *Epistrophe* – or each version of the tree – becomes a lyrical sequence, in which forms are constantly growing, reforming, repeating and returning to their origins. In *Epistrophy Red White* (PC2218), 2022, twisting curvatures of densely painted branches fan out like neural pathways as the tree hovers over a background of powdery, diffused pigment. *Epistrophy Grey White* (PC2213), 2022, is an ethereal depiction of the tree in soft grisaille tones and washes of white. Seen collectively, the trees exude vitality, 'epistrophy' not only referring to the literary and rhetorical effects of repetition, but also referencing the eponymous jazz standard composed in the 1940s by Thelonious Monk.

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The *Heads* paintings in the exhibition mark an emotive progression in this ongoing series, as Bevan takes on a looser and more abstracted approach to the subject matter. The demarcations of the face and skull become unrestrained, loops and marks just hinting at orifices, eyes and ears. In *Head (PC212)*, 2021, a spherical head and linear, trunk-like neck lay solidly on a neutral background which is scattered in parts with gestures of orange pigment dust. However, within the internal landscape of the unifying elemental structure, curves and bold angular marks are frantic; they are mere suggestions of features, leaving the viewer uncertain of the direction of gaze. Bevan has been exploring self-portraiture since the 1990s, taking inspiration from multitude traditions throughout art history, including the 18th century 'Character Heads' of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. He sees the head as the central core of humanity, thought and action, and self-portraiture as a form that gives freedom to go beyond surface appearance, to the liminal layer.

Bevan's profound aesthetic is distinguished by his exclusive use of charcoal and self-produced acrylic paints in a typically restrained palette of black, grey, orange and red. His process is considered yet vigorous. In these refined paintings, composed of his distinctive pigment-rich sinuous forms, Bevan lays raw canvas or paper onto the floor of his studio, applying pure pigment and charcoal directly. The splinters and dust of the charcoal and powdery pigments are preserved on the surface of his works, resulting in a highly dynamic tactility and insight into his working method.

In Bevan's persistent exploration of figurative and abstract representation, he infuses all his subjects – whether heads, architectural structures, trees or stones – with a powerful life force and intensity that transcend their original representation. In *Epistrophies and Heads*, a singular tree or head is rendered to its fundamental architectural pathways, resulting in abstracted, energetic and emotive formations that encourage contemplation and interpretation as the direct relationship between Bevan's subject matter becomes evident. Collectively, they convey a fascinating approach to the consideration of the mental space, exploring the pulsating energies and infinite rhythmic possibilities with astounding clarity.



© The Artist. Image courtesy of Ben Brown Fine Arts

ABOUT TONY BEVAN

Born in Bradford, England, in 1951, Tony Bevan studied at the Bradford School of Art in Bradford, England (1968-71), followed by Goldsmiths College (1971-74) and the Slade School of Fine Art (1974-76), both in London. Bevan has exhibited internationally since 1976, holding his first US solo exhibitions at Ronald Feldman Gallery in 1988 and L.A. Louver gallery in 1989. Bevan has exhibited at prominent institutions around the world, with solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, Munich; Whitechapel Gallery, London; and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. In 2005, a major retrospective of Bevan's work was held at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain. In 2007, Bevan was elected a Royal Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. His work is included in many prominent private and public collections, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and National Portrait Gallery and Tate, both in London.

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