

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Conor Harrington, *The Bandits at the Ballet*, 2024, oil and spray paint on canvas, 200 x 250 cm. (78 ¾ x 98 ⅝ in.)

CONOR HARRINGTON PALLIUM

Ben Brown Fine Arts

12 Brook's Mews, London W1K 4DG

7 November 2025 - 6 February 2026

Private view: 6pm, Thursday 6 November

Ben Brown Fine Arts is delighted to announce *Pallium*, an exhibition of new paintings by Conor Harrington, marking the first presentation of work by the acclaimed London based Irish artist with the gallery.

Harrington's paintings interrogate the legacies of colonialism, empire, and the masculinist ideals that underpin them – archaic systems of power that continue to shadow contemporary life. Drawing upon the conventions of history painting and the visual rhetoric of the eighteenth century, he reworks their languages of costume and symbol to expose the mechanisms through which authority was staged and sanctified. In his hands, these emblems of power are rendered as hollow vestiges, garments that outlive the bodies and beliefs they once adorned, emptied of conviction yet still haunting the present.

Reimagining classical history painting through a critical engagement with Britishness from an Irish perspective, Harrington's work is deeply informed by his own identity and his experience of life and politics in Britain. The artist was inspired by historical re-enactments he observed in Bristol where participants don period costume to restage scenes from the past. He saw in these performances a potent metaphor for the way outdated systems of power are maintained today.

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Two recurring motifs – bunting and ermine – cloak the shadowy protagonists of this series. Bunting, once a naval signal and now a token of festivity, functions as a hollow signifier of unity. Where national flags proclaim allegiance, bunting gestures only towards generic celebration. Its physical lightness and ephemerality become, in Harrington's hands, emblems of the fragility and vacuity of such symbols.

By contrast, ermine cloaks – ceremonial garments historically reserved for European monarchs and long associated with purity and prestige – carry the heavy residue of inherited authority. Their opulent weight bears down upon the figures, offering a visual counterpoint to the insubstantiality of the bunting. The tension between these two materials crystallises Harrington's critique of power as theatre – a spectacle in which the rituals of grandeur persist, even as their ideological substance has long since disintegrated

Pallium – from the Latin for “cloak” – refers both to the garments that drape Harrington's figures and to the region of the brain associated with memory. The title encapsulates the artist's wider enquiry into pageantry, power, and the ways history is constructed and sustained. Rather than depicting history, Harrington dissects the rituals through which it is performed, remembered, and mythologised – revealing authority itself as a costume repeatedly donned to preserve the illusion of continuity.

Fangs and Feelings (2025) possesses the formal monumentality and austere drama of David or Delacroix's battle scenes, recalling the 'grand style' of eighteenth-century history painting. The figures appear locked in confrontation, their gestures taut with energy and restraint, evoking the choreography of combat. Yet, rather than weapons, they grapple with strands of pastel-coloured bunting that twist around their bodies, binding them together in what feels less like a duel and more like a dance. In *Fangs and Feelings*, Harrington exposes the pageantry of power as a self-defeating performance, the participants ensnared not by enemies, but by the hollow symbols they attempt to uphold.

In *Welcome to the Cabaret* (2025), Harrington renders the ermine with meticulous realism, while the faces of his subjects dissolve into a haze of indistinct brushwork. The cloak endures, yet the body beneath it slips from grasp. The composition recalls Bacon's papal portraits – figures suspended between presence and disappearance. Harrington's technique crystallises the conceptual tension at the core of his practice: the seductive surface of power set against the collapse of its human foundation.

With *Pallium*, Harrington turns history painting inside out – exposing its seams, unpicking its myths, and holding the remnants to the light in a reckoning with the narratives that continue to shape us. His paintings refuse to glorify the past, instead questioning the stories we persist in telling about it. They offer not resolution but a space in which the performance of power can be seen for what it is. Yet beneath the pageantry, Harrington searches for the moment when the mask slips, the performance falters, and we are left to decide what might take its place.

ABOUT CONOR HARRINGTON

Conor Harrington (b. Cork, Ireland, 1980) is a painter preoccupied with the theatre of power – its rituals, its ruins, and the brittle performances of masculinity that prop it up. Drawing on the compositional gravitas of classical painting and informed on his Irish identity, Harrington confronts the lingering shadow of empire and the Catholic Church. Harrington began his career as a graffiti artist and remains deeply influenced by hip-hop culture and the energy of the street. He earned his BFA from Limerick School of Art and Design and has lived in London for two decades. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Saatchi Gallery, London; the Museum of Urban and Contemporary Art, Munich; and Southampton Arts Centre, New York.

ABOUT BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

Ben Brown Fine Arts is a leading international gallery specialising in post-war and contemporary art, with locations in London, Hong Kong, and New York. Founded in 2004 in Mayfair, London, it has become a distinguished presence in both primary and secondary art markets, representing an outstanding roster of contemporary artists like Tony Bevan, Candida Höfer, Vik Muniz, Yoan Capote, Gavin Turk, José Parlá, and Ena Swansea. Alongside contemporary art, the gallery is renowned for exhibitions of post-war masters, including Alighiero Boetti, Frank Auerbach, and Alexander Calder. Expanding its global presence, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened a gallery in Hong Kong in 2009, followed by a seasonal space in Palm Beach in 2021, and most recently, a gallery in New York in 2024. Notable recent exhibitions include *Planète Lalande* at the 60th Venice Biennale and *Calder: Extreme Cantilever* (London, 2024). Ben Brown Fine Arts is a regular participant in major international art fairs, including Art Basel (Basel, Miami Beach, and Hong Kong), the Armory Show (New York), Frieze Masters, TEFAF (Maastricht and New York), miart (Milan) and Art Mumbai.

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