

# BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Gavin Turk studio detail, photo by Laurence Rundell, Courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts

## GAVIN TURK THE ESCAPOLOGIST

11 March - 22 May 2026

Private view: Tuesday 10 March 6-8pm  
Ben Brown Fine Arts  
12 Brook's Mews, London W1K 4DG

**Q: When is a door not a door?**

**A: When it is ajar.**

**Ben Brown Fine Arts** is pleased to present ***The Escapologist***, the sixth solo exhibition of British artist **Gavin Turk** at the London gallery (**11 March - 22 May 2026**). The exhibition presents a new series of oil paintings depicting doors left ajar, each offering a glimpse into an ambiguous and surreal terrain beyond. Shown together, the works transform the gallery into a labyrinth of thresholds. Each painting functions as a portal, drawing the viewer towards a narrow opening that reveals a field of smooth, liquid brushwork. These passages dissolve into bands of luminous colour that suggest an atmospheric horizon, generating unstable optical effects that coax the eye into a false sense of depth.

For more than three decades, Turk has relentlessly interrogated the systems through which belief is produced – in images, in authorship, in value – using familiar forms, art historical tropes, psychoanalytic symbols and dreamlike objects to set perceptual traps. The door is a recurring motif in his practice and, like the egg that also appears throughout his work, carries both Surrealist symbolism and art historical weight. As Turk notes, *“When I see a door in a doorframe, I also see an egg. An egg is all door, in that sense, the door is both a point of departure and arrival.”* A ubiquitous object, the door embodies paradox. It marks both beginnings and endings and defines the unstable relationship between inside and outside.

As with much of Turk's work, these paintings engage directly with art history. They draw on Surrealist ideas of psychological thresholds, Renaissance ideas of painting as a window, and conceptual disruptions of function and space. The works recall the uncanny domestic interiors of René Magritte, the metaphysical stillness of Giorgio de Chirico, and Marcel Duchamp's *Door, 11 rue Larrey* (1927), a single door suspended between two doorways, perpetually both open and closed.

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Meticulously rendered in *trompe l'oeil*, the paintings draw on Gerhard Richter's *Tür* series of 1967. Richter's doors were not depictions of real architecture but constructed images that borrowed the authority of photography in order to undermine it. By applying photographic realism to an invented subject, Richter exposed the instability of representation and the fallibility of perception. Turk extends this logic further. Rather than asking what is real, he asks why we trust what we see. If Richter's doors probed the limits of painting in the face of photography, Turk's doors speak to a contemporary condition in which images are endlessly convincing yet fundamentally unreliable. These works offer not passage, but the promise of it, positioning perception itself as the site of escape.

Turk's engagement with the door is also shaped by a broader philosophical lineage. William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) proposed that human perception limits, rather than reveals, reality – an idea later taken up by Aldous Huxley in *The Doors of Perception* (1954).

The exhibition title points to this sleight of hand. An escapologist is defined by illusion, misdirection and belief, succeeding only because the audience wants to be convinced. Turk's paintings promise escape, yet hold the viewer in suspension, exposing the mechanisms through which images persuade and expectations take hold. As the artist observes, "*Escapology is the science of escaping, perhaps art and creativity is a form of escape, or a paradigm shift.*"

The exhibition also marks a deeply personal moment for the artist. Returning to the studio following a medical sabbatical that confronted his own mortality, vulnerability and endurance, Turk reflects on both individual experience and a wider human condition. Set against a climate of global cultural, economic and psychological instability, the works articulate a shared state of uncertainty and suspended meaning. The doors become sites of existential pause – thresholds that hold the viewer between one state of being and another.

In *The Escapologist*, Turk draws on a lineage in which painting has repeatedly tested the reliability of vision. Yet where Richter exposed the fault lines between painting and photography, Turk turns his attention to a contemporary condition shaped by endlessly persuasive images. In an age in which images are designed to convince rather than to be questioned, *The Escapologist* insists on doubt. It reopens the act of looking as a deliberate, reflective practice, suggesting that meaning is not found beyond the threshold, nor in escape from reality, but in the uneasy human experience of standing still and looking – aware of what cannot be known, yet compelled to look nonetheless.

## ABOUT GAVIN TURK

Gavin Turk (b. 1967, Guildford, Surrey) is a conceptual artist whose work interrogates ideas of authenticity, authorship and the 'myth' of the artist. Drawing on Surrealist methodologies, his practice is self-reflexive and often knowingly parodic, questioning the art world's value systems and the construction of the artist's persona. Turk came to prominence with his postgraduate degree show at the Royal College of Art where he presented *Cave* (1991): an empty, whitewashed room bearing a blue heritage plaque inscribed with his own name. The installation announced a sceptical, postmodern view of artistic status and reputation, establishing the use of his name as a recurring device within his practice. It brought Turk immediate notoriety following the attention of Charles Saatchi and led to his association with the generation of Young British Artists (YBAs). Since then, Turk has developed a wide-ranging body of work that examines the cultural and economic frameworks surrounding art and its makers. He frequently reconfigures the visual languages of artists who precede him, using art history as material through which questions of originality, influence and inheritance are explored. Working across sculpture, painting, photography, and print, Turk has pioneered approaches now familiar within British contemporary art, including painted bronze, waxwork, art-historical appropriation, and the use of discarded materials.

Turk studied at the Chelsea School of Art (1986 -1989) and the Royal College of Art (1989-1991), both in London. Turk's work is held in numerous public collections worldwide, including the Tate, London; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY; Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt; Saatchi Gallery, London; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), CA; Musée Magritte, Brussels; British Council, London; and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London.

## ABOUT BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

Ben Brown Fine Arts is an international gallery specialising in post-war and contemporary art with locations in London, Hong Kong and New York. Founded in London's Mayfair in 2004, the gallery operates across both primary and secondary markets and represents a group of leading contemporary artists including Tony Bevan, Awol Erizku, Candida Höfer, Vik Muniz, Yoan Capote, Nabil Nahas, Gavin Turk, José Parlá, Enoc Perez and Ena Swansea. Alongside its contemporary programme, Ben Brown Fine Arts is known for exhibitions of post-war figures such as Alighiero Boetti, Frank Auerbach, Alexander Calder, Lucio Fontana, Gerhard Richter and Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne. The gallery expanded to Hong Kong in 2009, opened a seasonal space in Palm Beach in 2021, and established a New York gallery in 2024. Recent landmark exhibition projects include *Planète Lalanne* at the 60th Venice Biennale (2024), *Calder: Extreme Cantilever* (London, 2024), and *Alighiero e Boetti: Embellishing the Sky* (London, 2025). The gallery participates regularly in international art fairs, including Art Basel (Basel, Hong Kong and Miami Beach), Frieze Masters, TEFAF (Maastricht and New York), Miart, the Armory Show and Art Mumbai.

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