

## **Giles Alexander**

***Mote of dust***, solo exhibition

Peter Walker Fine Art

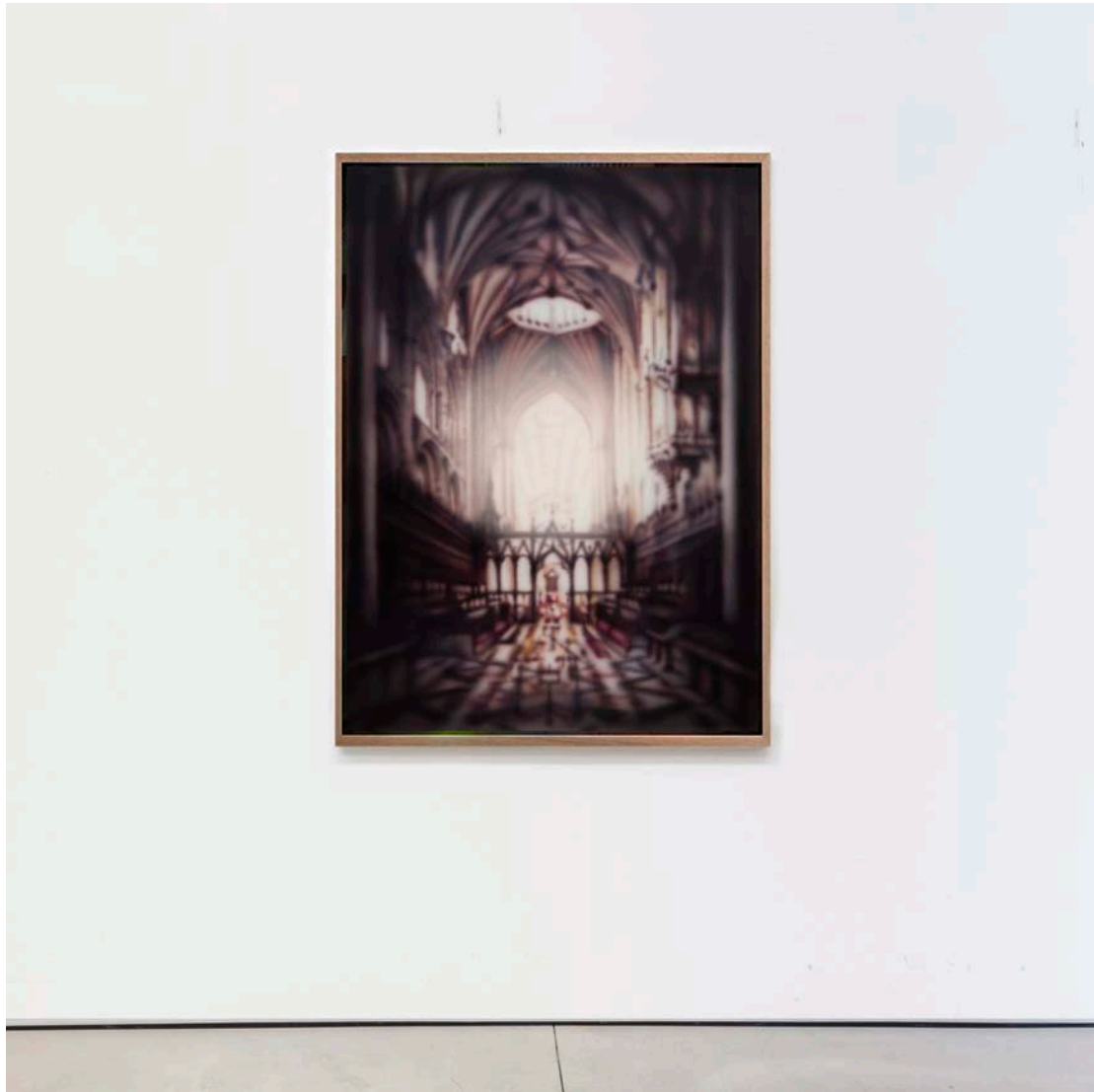
May 2022



***The Dawn of Man***

Giles Alexander's painting practice thinks deeply about belonging and its dual expressions in culture and science. He asks how we find a sense of belonging in a city, in a country, in the world, indeed in the Universe? To date Alexander's exacting work has peered through the lens of faith and reason, representing spiritual and celestial spaces in equal measure. In holding a mirror up to the paradox that is our place in the world, his realist painting preoccupations attempt to offer both himself and the viewer pause and perspective amid these image omnipresent times.

Alexander's work has been shown both locally and internationally, with major presentations in his native London, in New York, Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia. His work has been included in numerous art awards including the Archibald, Sulman, Moran and Blake prizes and are held in private and public collections around the world



***If you love somebody, set them free***

*“It is an old truism that art assumes the place of religion in modernity; the corollary is that religious art, of which church architecture is the most complete expression, comes to be the focus of awe. In that sense, Giles’s paintings are fuelled by admiration; they have the aura of spectral relics from the age of belief*

*Placing disparate things starkly together is to create a poetic marvel, which as Aristotle said long ago opens the door to the other side of reality. A marvel shows something that might be true if the humdrum laws of the world were relaxed for a moment. In art as in religion - marvel and miracle have the same root - the mind is willing and able to imagine things that cannot be experienced in the normal course of events. A painting of the Virgin Mary who cries real tears? Okay. A celestial orb suspended inside a basilica? Alright. The church is many things: the ark (the central aisle of a church is called a nave, from the Latin word for ship) of the Flood; the tabernacle of the Holy of Holies; the body of the Virgin; the Corpus Christi; the bejeweled Jerusalem of the Book of Revelations, crowned by the domus of God. Conceptually, the idea of the church is massive enough to house the cosmos and overcoming the physical difficulty of accommodating a modest asteroid within its space requires no more than a reasonable suspension of disbelief.*

*Giles is at a crossing, waving goodbye to his youth. He is painfully aware that life allegorises itself. The father who imbued in him the love of architecture and perspective and history has gone. What awaits his own son seems fragile. The world is burning and demagoguery is on the rise; meanwhile, this exhibition has emerged from under the pall of a pandemic. Conditions are right for millenarian thinking.”*

Dr Michael Hill, Head of Art History & Theory, National Art School



***Pink Moon***

*“Some artists, for instance Rubens, Seurat, and Australia’s Jon Cattapan manage to combine abstraction and figuration within the same canvas – as did Turner; others have long periods of one style before switching to the other – Peter Booth and Philip Guston, for example, or switching materials – paint to sculpture – as did the mid-career Linda Marrinon, or from neo-expressionist painting to screenbased installation in the evolving works of Susan Norrie. And a very few – Richter, Andy Warhol, Louise Weaver, and Giles Alexander – progress abstract and figurative careers simultaneously.”*

Dr Peter Hill is a Scottish-born Australian artist, writer, independent curator and academic.

*“Maybe this particulate pigment spray that I use in these new works, emitted from the air brush nozzle, somehow speaks to a sense of the dissolving grand narratives.”*



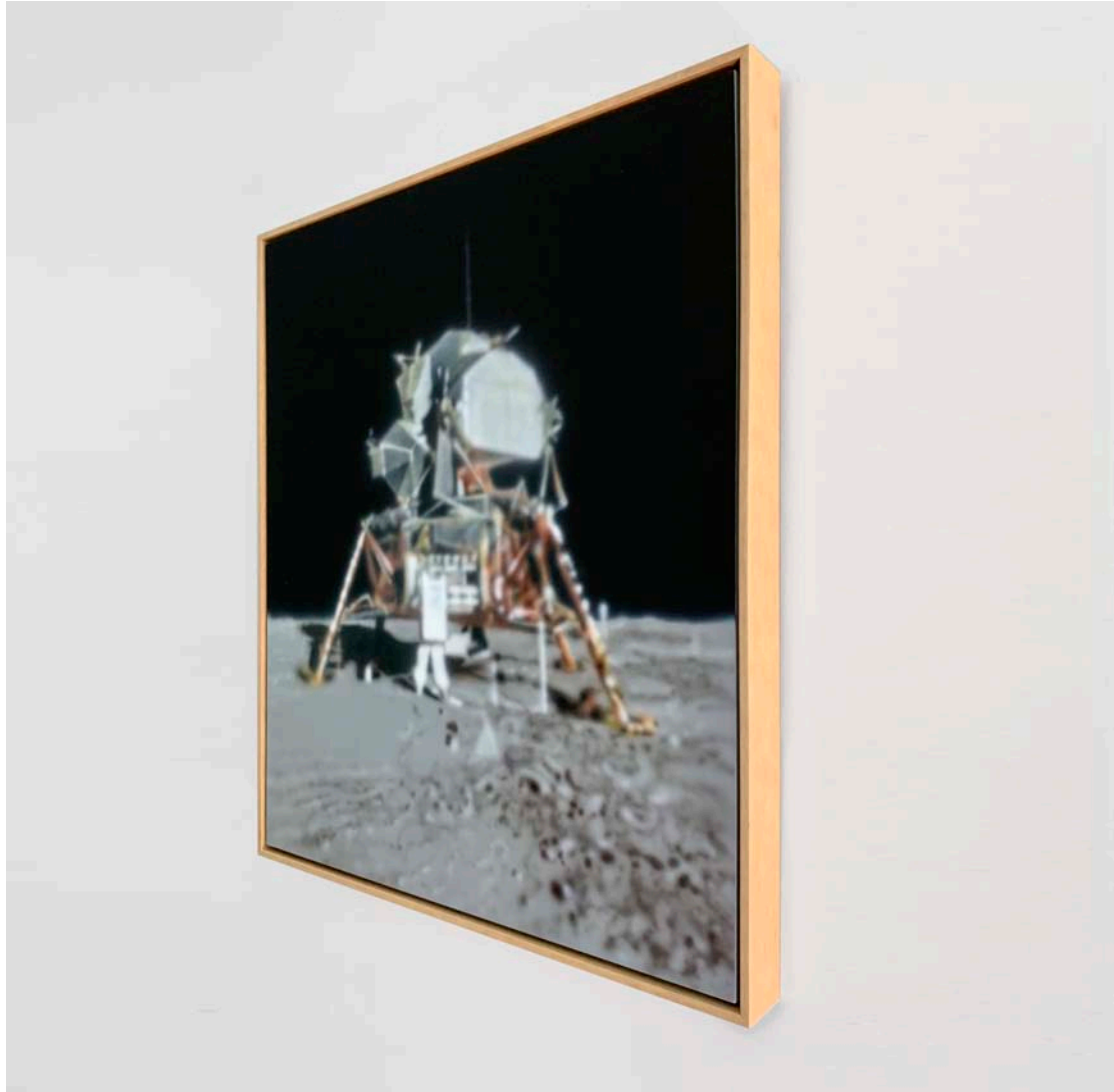
**The Adoration of Reason**

*“Alexander is performing a double illusion—they are representations of representations, which, on first inspection, appear to be as real as their source material. But these paintings also suggest the way in which astronomy relies on a similar suspension of disbelief. Like Alexander’s paintings, the ‘photographs’ we have of the universe consist of images and data points stitched together from multiple sources. Just as the painter must work with colour and shade, so too must the astrophysicist become a translator of light.*

*For Alexander, space travel functions as a site for the imaginary—a place to (re)consider narratives of progress and discovery. Alexander is considering the permutations and offshoots of human history through the wide-angle lens of the universe. Indeed, it is the act of placing these works side by side that allows for the slow reveal of a multi-linear narrative.*

*Taken this way, Eternity: Far Away. So Close. becomes less about the unknown corners of the cosmos and more about the experience of being human: What counts as progress? What value does truth hold in the face of 13.8 billion years? Can we see an image of the earth without being reminded of our hubris and our fragility? Because as much as our obsession with space is propelled by our need to think through new worlds, it is also driven by the desire to better understand and reshape this world—a world in which we all must live.”*

Naomi Riddle is the founding editor of Running Dog



**Baby Steps**

*"It's almost as though Alexander has attempted a time capsule for the impending end of humanity – our attempts to capture knowledge – the vast library in Space for Reading, the search for our place in the cosmos in Galileo's crows nest, our tentative first steps onto the unknown terrain of the Moon in Baby Steps and our ever-going quest to find spiritual succour in churches and temples of all faiths*

*Alexander, it would seem, is determined to investigate any and all aspects of what may be described as a 'hyperobject.' In his recent book *Hyperobjects Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Timothy Morton coins the term 'hyperobjects' to describe events or systems that are too complex, too massively distributed across space and time, for humans to get a grip on."*

Ashley Crawford, Melbourne based cultural critic, author, essayist and arts journalist

*(It would be too much to point out that one of the Virgin's symbols is the moon, complement to the sun which is Christ; she is the morning star, the star of the Sea – Ave Maris stella.)*

The following excerpt from Carl Sagan's book *Pale Blue Dot* was inspired by an image taken, at Sagan's suggestion, by Voyager 1 on 14 February 1990. As the spacecraft was departing our planetary neighborhood for the fringes of the solar system, it turned it around for one last look at its home planet.

Voyager 1 was about 6.4 billion kilometers (4 billion miles) away, and approximately 32 degrees above the ecliptic plane, when it captured the famous portrait of our world. Caught in the center of scattered light rays (a result of taking the picture so close to the Sun), Earth appears as a tiny point of light, a crescent only 0.12 pixel in size.

*"Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there--on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.*

*The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds.*

*Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.*

*The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.*

*It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."*

Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*, 1994