

Alexander James – Born London 1967

Distil Ennui. **definition...** 'to extract the essence and beauty of life to appease world weariness.' *Alexander James*

The Distil Ennui ® Studio was formed in 1990 by English artist Alexander James. Exploring the liquid mechanics of water as a primary medium for three decades through studio & location based practice. These works are documented underwater on analogue cameras without the use of post production, and since 2013 all artworks are unique with no editions ever to be released.



introductory text by *Andrei Tolstoy*. (née. *Leo Tolstoy*). 1956-2016.

Professor of Arts, Russian Academy of Arts & President AICA Russia, May 2014.

'Artist Alexander James creates meticulously crafted sculptural scenes; using studio made props, breeding butterflies, growing period specific flowers, hand making the dress and 24 carat gold halo for his Ophelia in 'Witness', 2012 from 'A beautiful announcement of death'; endeavours that imbue a harmonious dialogue with his subject that is ultimately to be encased within a vast underwater landscape. He does this solely for one purpose, that of documenting the realisation on a single 8 * 10 inch analogue camera plate.

These photographic plates are the only existing record of a far bigger conceptual process that is produced through his complete dedication to a renaissance studio practice. Perhaps in an effort to exercise a form of control; to relive its tragic baroque beauty. To preserve its memory, from ever being able to fade away.

The introduction of water serves its purpose both symbolically and as the functional device through which to achieve the painterly execution of these works; with the interaction of brushes and the artists bare hands on the surface tension of the water, literally painting the subject in light; the results of which are aching with the dramatic radiance of Caravaggio.

Working with analogue camera equipment and without post production, his life long dedication to in-camera purity establishes its provenance when linked to painstaking preparatory work.'

--- Transcript from RTV Interview, March 2014 ---

'Technique is really a side issue, though complex you have to ask yourself why I would only want to make work in this way. The photography element now seems to be purely a documentary act to capture these interventions, the photograph itself being a way to fix and extend the work. I do this to preserve its memory before it fades; to frame its tragic baroque beauty in as pure a form as I can possibly endure.

The only strange thing about my practice is that I only want to produce these kind of works, and only this way. It can be done in other ways, but it would not be the same; not at all: through darkroom or digital manipulation of some kind, but this does not appeal to me. I have no desire to manipulate anything other than these liquid mechanics; if I used these other methods, tricks would occur to me and I would be able to repeat them endlessly, to me that would be horrific and the pieces no good.

The scene is there, created underwater; now I want to see the places it will go, new and unrepeatable. It appeals to me to be able to handle the work like this; not knowing what is coming.

In relation to editions, the current reproducible capacity of photography is both its force and its failing, I am provoked by the notion that a painting is intrinsically more valuable than a photograph primarily because of its singular uniqueness. To counter this perception; since late 2013 I now only produce unique prints from each work with no editions in an attempt to challenge the ideas concerning the spiritual and economic valuation of artworks and to create an exciting tension between their individual present and relinquished, reproducible past.'

ACADEMIC & PRESS QUOTES

'The photograph is the only existing record of a far bigger conceptual process produced through his dedication to a renaissance studio practice.'

— *Critical text by Andrei Tolstoy (née. Leo) 1956-2016. Russian Academic & Professor Of Arts. May 2014.*

'The meticulous nature of James' work marks him out as an artist at the forefront of contemporary photography, combining multimedia elements as part of his unique style.'

— *Article by Jess Rayner, Arts Correspondent, The Global Panorama. May 23rd 2014.*

'Walking in to any show by English artist Alexander James is like being in a multi story car park lit by Dan Flavin.'

— *Article by Anna McNay, Arts Correspondent, Studio International. 5th May 2014*

'Aching with the dramatic radiance of Caravaggio, James' figures arise from a well of negative potential, as if from the depths of the fugitive self.'

— *Article by Lizzy Hajos, critical writer & academic. September 2011.*

'With the recent acquisition of 'The great leveller' into The Donna Span Collection 'Light: An Eternal Presence'; with the piece I am reminded of other artists: words found in the great Russian texts, the sonnets of John Donne, and sounds from the music of John Tavener. The Great Leveller sits in fine company. It is a Vanitas in contemporary dress captured through the lens of a camera.'

— *Note to artist from Donna Span, Founder. The Donna Spaan Contemporary Collection of Art, Calvin College, USA. May 2016.*

'The consistency of his artistic vision is one of the most remarkable things about Alexander James. Having discovered his voice in the late eighties, he has devoted himself to articulating it with the lifelong self-discipline of a medieval monk. In our publicity chasing era, such conviction commands respect. He is an oak tree in the landscape of contemporary art, not some lesser rooted artist bowing wherever the wind of public opinion takes it.'

— *noted in letter from Professor Andrei Tolstoy (née. Leo) 1956-2016. dated 14th July 2014.*

'James' fanatical insistence on being involved with every aspect of his creations is awe inspiring, and is perhaps only matched by his disdain for the easy route.'

— *Article by Dominic Perry, Culture Correspondent, Philistine Magazine. January 2016*

'I only buy things as a dealer when I have a belief in the quality of the work. I may not like it, but it has to be the absolute best.'

— *Quoted from collector Ivor Braka, fine art dealer on acquiring 'Multiply' from 'Vanitas', Fine Art Fund. May 2013.*

'A poignant celebration of life and elevation of the banal that achieves a balance between voyeurism and intimacy'

— *Article by Davina Catt, Arts Editor, Interview Magazine. 25th April 2014.*

'Captures animals and plants submerged in water at an ambiguous point between life and death with painterly compositions that are the product of a renaissance art practice and science'

— *Article by Lizzy Hajos, critical writer & academic. September 2011.*

'This method of exploring the subtle distortions the water makes on light is painstakingly exact and the results are quite extraordinary.'

— *Article by Lucy Davies, The Telegraph. August 2011.*

'English artist Alexander James captures the Dutch tradition, while being strikingly original and contemporary'

— *Book published by Thames & Hudson by Dr Michael Petry, 'Nature Morte'. December 2012.*

'Exciting floral arrangements are juxtaposed against violent chemical reactions, common flora is transposed into an ambiguous setting creating highly complex and timeless imagery'

— *Article by John Routledge, Arts Academic titled 'Fusion'.*

'Capturing the haunting and ephemeral moment in an intense state of depth and chiaroscuro.'

— *Article by Nina Azzarello, Arts Correspondent, DesignBoom. 14th May 2014.*

Alexander James

Born 1967, London

Lives London

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 05-2017 – '[All icons are false](#)' May 2017, London.
- 05-2016 – '*The illusion of oils*' Ekaterinburg, Russia.
- 04-2015 – 'Vanitas', [Cob Gallery](#) 21st April until 31st July 2015.
- 01-2015 – '[Oil + Water](#)' 9 sculptural works created & installed during winter in the forests of Siberia.
- 10-2014 – 'Vanitas', [Cafe Royal](#), Regent Street, London. 2 October 2014 until 2 January 2015.
- 04-2014 – '[Rastvorennaya Pechal](#)' April 2014, Triumph Gallery - Moscow.
- 04-2013 – '*Intersection*' hosted by Peter Simon, founder of [The Monsoon Collection](#) & PAM.
- 05-2012 – '[A beautiful announcement of death](#)' at Pertwee Anderson & Gold Gallery, London
- 06-2011 – '*Still Even*' Pertwee Anderson & Gold Gallery, London.
- 05-2010 – '*Taxi*' at [Ann330 Gallery](#), Los Angeles.
- 04-2010 – '*Tokyo Green*' Conningsby Gallery, London.
- 09-2009 – '*Space & Time*' London.
- 01-2008 – '*Working Water*' RCP Gallery, Sydney.
- 09-2006 – '*Flight*' The Boiler House, Shanghai.
- 11-2004 – '*Shift*' 109 Building, Shibuya, Tokyo.
- 08-2003 – '*No Logo*' Maison Bastille, Paris.
- 08-2002 – '*The Colour Candy*' Sydney.
- 09-2000 – '*Flesh & Foliage*' Loft 56, New York
- 07-1999 – '*Liquid Mechanics*' 18 installation works created across Kent chalk streams.
- 01-1996 – '*Defloxio*' deviation plinths installed in Los Angeles floodwater causeway.
- 12-1995 – '*Dreams walking past*' Guerrilla installation Fifth Avenue, New York.
- 02-1990 – '*Flight*' London.
- 09-1987 – '*Parking For Free*' Guerrilla show in New York car park building across three levels.
- 02-1986 – '*Intervened*' 20 installation works created underwater on endangered reefs across the Caribbean.
- 07-1985 – '*Under the surface*' National Pantheon, Santa Domingo, Dominican Republic.

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

- 02-2017 – Museum of Contemporary Art select '[Vanitas](#)' works for '[Narte Morte](#)'. Four Domes Pavillion, Warsaw.
- 05-2016 – '*Contemporary Vanitas*', Lights Of Soho Gallery curated by Lee Sharrock.
- 04-2016 – '[Reinvigorating the still life](#)' Konsthallen Bohuslän Museum, Sweden.
- 11-2015 – [Castle Street](#), Cob Gallery.
- 06-2015 – '*Nature Morte*'. Museum exhibition, [Stavanger, Norway](#).
- 08-2014 – [Photo Shanghai](#) with [Valérie-Anne Giscard d'Estaing](#).
- 02-2012 – Curated Exhibition, Adam Weymouth, Pertwee Anderson & Gold Gallery, London.
- 12-2011 – '*Iconoclasts*' [Lloyds Club](#), London.
- 10-2011 – '[The House Of The Nobleman](#)' London, Curated by Victoria Golembiovskaya. SOLD OUT.
- 01-2011 – '*Artmosh*' The Post House, Munich.
- 12-2010 – '*Artmosh*' London.
- 10-2010 – '*You Are Here*' Flaere Gallery, London.
- 07-2009 – '*Artmosh*' Door Studios, Paris.

SELECTED PROJECTS

- 10-2016 – Launch of [iBeacon Mobile App](#). enabling physical exhibition experiences & secure artwork authentication.
- 01-2016 – [Three Films](#) released from the 2015 artist residency.
- 07-2015 – [Artist Residency Program](#), 8 artists working from the London studio during August 2015.
- 01-2015 – Studio relocates to Siberia to create a new body of work '[Oil + Water](#)'.
- 12-2014 – Artist talk '*Deconstructing Flow Practice*', [Cafe Royal](#), London.
- 09-2014 – London residency placement offered to Russian painter [Alex Kuznetsov](#).
- 11-2013 – Studio relocates historic 'Red October' chocolate factory in Moscow to create '[Rastvorennaya Pechal](#)'.
- 03-2012 – '*Tokyo Taxi*' published by [Merrell](#), photography & texts (2002 - 20012) Alexander James.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 07-2016 - article '[The butterfly effect](#)' Christie's International Magazine.
- 06-2016 - article 'Dancing with butterflies' with Tricia Divets, [Private Air Magazine](#).
- 01-2016 - [Philistine Magazine](#) 'Pure Process' article with [Crista Leonard & Dominic Perry](#).
- 12-2015 - Russia Today TV '[Immersed In Moscow](#)' documentary on relocation to Russia to create 'Rastvorennaya Pechal'.
- 12-2015 - '[Portrait of an artist](#)' article by Eloise Stevens.
- 09-2015 - Article '[Chaos In Residence](#)' by Eloise Stephens who resided in the studio with the 8 resident artists..
- 08-2015 - Article [FOUR Magazine's](#) Arts Editor, Eva Luis Schwatz, published in Germany August 2015
- 06-2015 - '[OIL + WATER](#)' shortlisted for '[Environmental photographer of the year 2015](#)' award.
- 11-2014 - [Laissez Faire Arts](#) article '[Ophelia & The Chocolate Factory](#)' written by Britt Pflüger.
- 09-2014 - '[Deutsche Welle](#)' broadcast [EuroMax TV's](#) studio visit to explore the underwater process.
- 07-2014 - Josh Sims from Billionaire Magazine [interview with discussions of Russia](#).
- 08-2014 - [article by Anna McNay](#), Arts Critic for Studio International discussing Russia with Alexander James.
- 06-2014 - Article '[An Englishman in Moscow](#)' written by Arts Editor, Sophie Jane Newstead for Bric Magazine.
- 04-2014 - Arts Correspondent for the The Global Panorama [Jess Rayner](#) article '[Underwater Installation Art](#)'
- 03-2014 - Professor Andrei Tolstoy; née Leo Tolstoy, critical text for '[Rastvorennaya Pechal](#)'.
- 03-2014 - [Article by Royal Photographic Society](#), 'First English artist in 30 years to prepare & exhibit works within Russia'.
- 02-2014 - FAD Art's Editor Kimberly Brown; [article discussing my relocation to Russia](#).
- 11-2013 - BLOUIN ARTS-INFO, Moscow Arts Editor; Nastassia Astrasheuskaya article.
- 10-2013 - [Thames & Hudson](#) publish '[Natre Morte](#)' with key Vanitas works & texts by Dr Michael Petry.
- 08-2013 - Moscow Times Newspaper; Arts Editor Garrison Golubock text on '[Art & Russia](#)'
- 03-2012 - '[Tokyo Taxi](#)' published by [Merrell](#), photography & texts (2002 - 20012) Alexander James.
- 09-2010 - [Association of photographers IMAGE Magazine](#); front cover and lead article exploring '[Fusion](#)'
- 06-2010 - Article '[Fusion](#)' by Academic John Routledge.

COLLECTIONS...

- 04-2016 - 'The Great Leveller' joins The Donna Spaan Contemporary Collection of Art, Calvin College, USA.
- 07-2013 - 'Morpho Rhetenor Helena' joins the [Monsoon Art Collection](#).
- 04-2013 - 'Multiply' from '[Vanitas](#)' acquired by Ivor Braka of [The Fine Art Fund](#).
- 04-2011 - 'Talk to me' permanent [Davis Lisboa Museum](#) collection.

MEDIA LINKS...

- 01-2016 - Artist Residency Film '[Shifting Parameters](#)' released.
- 01-2016 - Artist Residency Film '[Water Light](#)' released.
- 12-2015 - RTV Television Documentary '[Immersed in Moscow](#)'.
- 04-2014 - [M24 Television interview](#) at opening of Moscow Solo Exhibition "Rastvoyrennaya Pechal".
- 02-2014 - Voice Of Russia. [Radio interview](#), London.
- 02-2014 - PRIVET [Television interview](#) given in the 'Red October' studio. Moscow.
- 09-2014 - Deutsche Welle, EuroMax [television interview](#), studio, London.
- 08-2014 - [article by Anna McNay](#), Arts Critic for Studio International discussing Russia with Alexander James.
- 01-2014 - Laissez-Faire's Arts Editor Britt Pflüger with an in depth [interview discussing 'Process & Russia'](#).
- 12-2012 - '[Intersection](#)' Film I, studio, London.

CATALOGUE LINKS...

- 'All icons are false' [Exhibition Catalogue](#)
- 'Transparency of a dream' [Exhibition Catalogue](#)
- 'Rastvorennaya Pechal' [Exhibition Catalogue](#) (english & Russian text)
- 'Intersection' [Exhibition Catalogue](#) (english text)
- 'Intersection' [Exhibition Catalogue](#) (russian text)
- 'Vanitas' [Catalogue](#) (russian text)
- 'Vanitas' [Catalogue](#) (english text)
- 'A beautiful announcement of death' [Exhibition Catalogue](#)
- 'Swarm' [Catalogue](#)
- 'OIL + WATER' [Catalogue](#)

RECENT AUCTION RESULTS

08-2016 – 'Untitled Plate 0813-021' Unique Chromogenic Print 160 x 160 cms \$15,000 USD

05-2016 – 'The Great Leveller' No 9 of 20. Chromogenic Print 19 x 25 cms \$2750 USD

08-2013 – Christie's Contemporary 'Grace' AP No. 1. Chromogenic Print 200 x 150 cms \$19,000 USD



Alexander James

'Morpho Amathonta 0220'

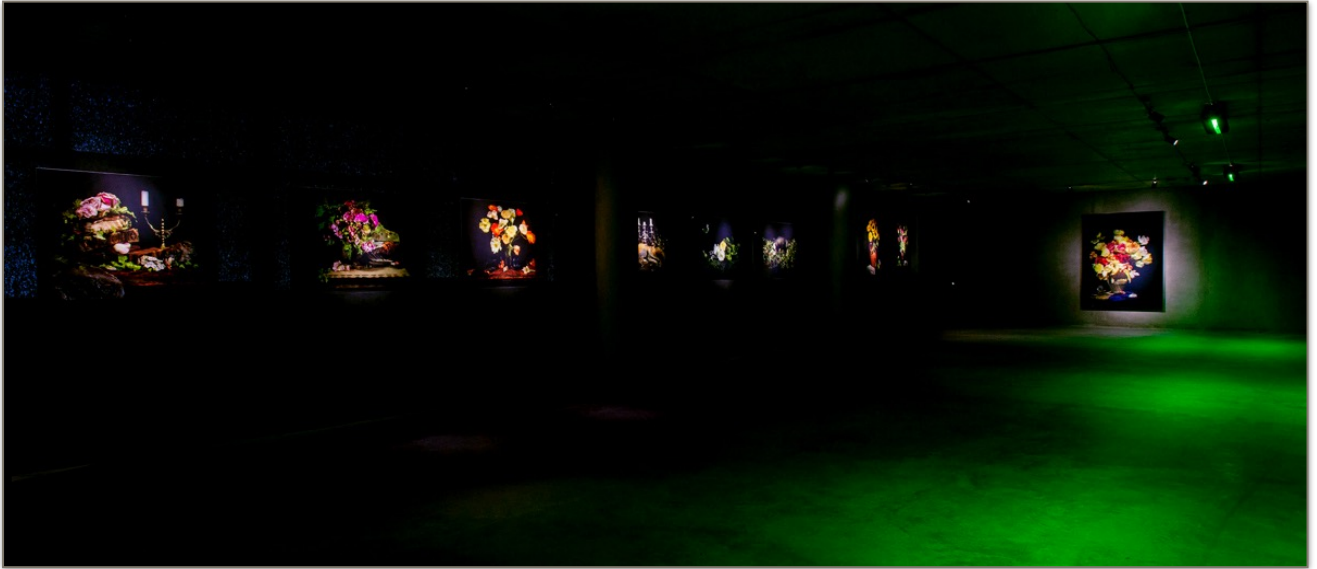
from 'Swarm' dated 2011

C-type print, dry mounted to a polished 3mm aluminium plate.

Face mounted with museum acrylic.

160 x 160 cms

3 Sized Editions of 10 – SOLD OUT



Installation view of *Vanitas Room 'Intersection'* Exhibition London 2013



'*Floating Cemetery*' black water installation for the exhibition '*Rastvorennaya Pehcal*'; Moscow 2014