

Victoria Miro Gallery

Press Release

Verne Dawson • Wheel of Fortune

18 February – 29 March 2003

The Victoria Miro Gallery is delighted to present the American painter Verne Dawson in his first solo exhibition in London.

Maurizio Cattelan: *Why Painting?* **Verne Dawson:** *Painting is a primary activity, somewhere between whistling and scratching.* (Flash Art, 11/02)

In his own words Dawson paints “*still lives of tools and materials of painting, insects, birds, plants and animals, visions of prehistoric communities, also futuristic communities, historic figures and events, people and objects of affection and sexual appeal, numbers, calendars, planets and stars.*” His paintings unite creation myths with phenomena of the modern world and look at concepts of tradition and modernity.

Verne Dawson's interest in the past is an effort to show the continuity of ancient, even prehistoric culture in the present, often revealed in symbols and tales relating to the telling of time, marked by a persistent and common use of numbers in attributes of myth and popular culture, holidays and festivals. In looking back to the beginnings of humankind Dawson hopes to create an understanding of the present and possible insights into the future. For the artist the sense of the presence of the past in the here and now and implication for what lies ahead, is not something far-fetched, but with us at every turn.

There is a saying from the South that Dawson, a native of Alabama quotes: “*The past isn't dead. The past isn't even past!*”

“It is a thrill of recognition to walk down Broadway, the old Indian trail of Manhattan, the only diagonal street that transverses the island, the road that predates the colonial grid, wearing a pair of shoes based on a pre-Colombian moccasin design, which now we call “penny loafers”.

Frequently described in terms reserved for Folk or Outsider Art, Dawson's painting style is deceptively simple and built up of softly brushed surfaces. His paintings are spacious, fantastic landscapes rendered in lush greens and blues, dominated by gigantic earthworks, natural formations or giant para-stadiums. Dotted throughout are scenes of people, bathing, holding babies, or engaged in pagan like rituals. Often situated at the bottom of the canvas the figures are almost always tiny, cast against an imposing combination of nature and the void.

This exhibition will present approximately eight new paintings including two large works *Olduvai Gorge*, 2002, an important archeological site in Tanzania where many of the earliest remains of homo-sapiens have been found, and *The Massacre of the Little People by the Big People*, 2003. This painting depicts a battle of primitive warfare, of an adversary with the advantage of greater strength looting and eradicating people of lesser means of warfare. The setting for the work is Great Britain at least 800 years ago when tribes of diminutive people, four to five feet tall, allegedly populated the land. Successive invasions and massacres over many centuries by the larger peoples of Northern Europe drove these tiny people to the hills and forests. Over time they became rarer and harder to find and their physical attributes became mythical to the occupying race. Eventually they imbued them with magical powers and shrank them to inhuman dimensions, to become, perhaps, the fairies and leprechauns of our childhood myths.

Verne Dawson (b. 1961) divides his time between New York and Pennsylvania and in recent years has exhibited at the Kunsthalle, Zurich, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, le Consortium de Dijon and The Royal Academy, London. Dawson continues to show internationally with Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York, Galleria Monica de Cardenas, Milan and Galerie Hauser & Wirth & Presenhuber, Zurich.

For further press information please contact Kathy Stephenson, 020 7 549 0422, kathy@victoria-miro.com