

curated by nick hackworth

history painting now

May 6th – June 4th, 2011
Private View: May 5th 6.30pm – 8.30pm

PRESS RELEASE

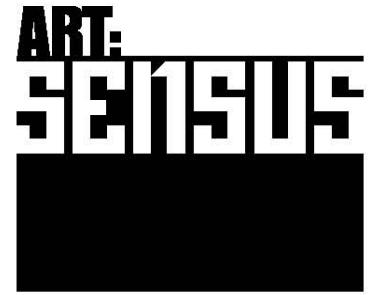
The tightly curated exhibition **History Painting Now** will examine the contemporary inversion of the values of History Painting.

Focusing primarily on artistic engagements with contemporary and current wars, **History Painting Now** investigates how such work operates, asking what its relationship with power might be. It also questions what space is left to the visual artist, in an age of 24 hr news coverage and multiple digital and social media channels of communication, to engage with state power and what techniques and tactics may be employed to do so.

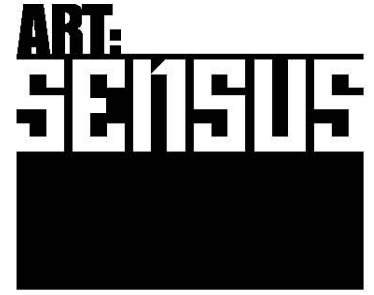
Artists include:

David Birkin, whose photographic and 2D/sculptural works in the exhibition take the formal visual language of the military, reforming it to reveal the emotive and personal strata that lie beneath; Adam Bromberg & Oliver Chanarin who, in a steady disengagement from the traditional position of the engaged photographer, have developed a strategy of restrained elliptical engagement; Jeremy Hutchinson who, with a background in advertising, plays within the structure of linguistics to distort and invert perception through the medium of digital and graphic art; and Tess Hurrell, whose work is primarily studio-based photography that incorporates sculptural devices, often their relationship being integral to their mutual existence. The transparency or simplicity of the construct acts to frame photography as a subject, questioning its particular perception of space and time.

From the Renaissance through to the end of the Academic period, History Painting was the highest expression of Western art. Its position at the pinnacle of the traditionally recognized hierarchy of genres of Academic painting, which included portrait painting, still life, and later, landscape painting, can be simply explained. History Painting was the clearest artistic expression - in any cultural form - of the ideology of elite groups that dominated Western societies during that period. Whether we look at early examples, such as Uccello's *Battle of San Romano*, or at later exemplary works such as Benjamin West's *The Death of*



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General Wolfe, we see artistic expression articulating the instrumental demands of power, be it constituted in aristocratic, monarchical or nation state form.

In History Painting we see power promoting its values outwards to its dominions and, not least, back again to itself.

Alongside the rise of individualism that was, arguably, the key social and economic development allowing both the birth of consumer society and Modernist culture, emerged the ideal of artistic autonomy. Inevitably, the genre of History Painting evaporated. Yet, whilst the world of art changed, the world itself has not.

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Featured art-work:

Blown to Brits, News of the World, 20th March 2011 | Jeremy Hutchison | digital inkjet print, PVC banner, aluminium rail | 609.6 x 309.8cm