
PRESS RELEASE

RAY ATKINS - *At the Forest's Edge* - New Paintings

26 June – 24 July 2015



Pic de Gor suddenly appears, snowy weather, 2011; oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm

Ray Atkins has spent his entire life as a painter working outdoors on boards, often huge, which are secured to a temporary structure and left in-situ until the picture is finished. This is landscape as experienced; landscape in perpetual movement. Leon Kossoff wrote that:

Ray Atkins uses the outside world as a studio. The landscape emerges from day to day involvement with an ever changing subject which is finally committed to a specific visual experience. I have admired these paintings for many years.

Atkins' reputation was secured in the mid70s with a solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery after which he moved West. First to Reading and then to Cornwall where the landscape of broken ground and dereliction captured his imagination: working clay pits, granite quarries, active or disused tin mines and discreet sites along the coast that featured in major retrospective exhibitions at The Royal West of England Academy and Kilkenny Arts Festival.

Now his boards are to be found out on the hillsides that surround his isolated home in the foothills of the Pyrenees, 5 km along a winding track from the nearest settlement. Working out in the open may be liberating, every mark one of freshness, exuberance and spontaneity, but this is to mask the slow and solitary struggle that takes place: a physical and mental ordeal that in the past had involved travelling long distances from studio to site. Now Atkins works in this remote part of France within a few meters of his studio in the midst of a dramatic and ever-changing semi-wilderness.

For a couple of years after the move Atkins tried different subjects: glimpses of the mountain beyond the forest or responses to the changing seasons. But despite the beauty and intensity of the place it proved difficult to find a subject that held some deeper meaning for him until he realised that it was the forest that dominated everything, not the mountains. And so the 'Forest' series was born: the single most ambitious project since moving to France. The first of these paintings made an appearance at Art Space Gallery in 2011; the most recent is the centrepiece of this exhibition.

A graduate of the Slade in the 60s, Ray Atkins has shown regularly at Art Space Gallery since 1989. He has work in private and public collections in Germany, U.S.A and the UK, including the Arts Council, British Council and the British Museum.