

PORTFOLIO

JOHN ROBINSON

SELECTED WORKS

A REAL GIRL

OIL ON CANVAS, 2026

50 x 41 CM

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My paintings begin in performance. I construct masks, costumes and props from reproductions of paintings, religious images, cosmological diagrams, domestic objects and cheap jewellery. I choose them because each already carries some idea of how the world is ordered. I photograph myself inside them, then rebuild the encounter in oil.

My queerness has taught me to recognise myself obliquely in images that have no place prepared for me. Sometimes I inhabit the image of a beautiful woman; elsewhere it may be a saint, king, monster or the universe itself. Wearing an image lets me test the world it carries. A diagram of the universe can look complete until I cut holes in it for my eyes and try to breathe inside it.

The paintings preserve what remains after an invented ceremony. I am drawn to transformation almost working while the body, object or source image shows through. I like that failure. It can be comic, painful or ecstatic. I return to the point where a mask reveals rather than conceals, and where borrowed things become temporary bodies through which another hidden theatre of self appears briefly before receding, once more, into the material fact of painting.

INTO THE TREES (THOU SHALT COVER THY FACE)
OIL ON CANVAS, 2025 · 150 × 120 CM

WITH OPEN FACE
BEHOLDING AS IN A GLASS
(THOU SHALT COVER THY
FACE)

OIL ON CANVAS, 2025 · 120
× 160 CM

The title comes from 2
Corinthians 3:18, where
reflection and transformation
into an image occur in the
same sentence. A
reproduction of a Hobbema
landscape is worn as a face;
torn apertures allow the body
to look back through it.



CRUMPLED HEADS, 2025



00:32



02:21



02:44



03:07

Performance for camera, 3 min 16 sec

Artist's studio, Worcester, UK

Video stills courtesy of the artist

Seated before a makeshift cardboard backdrop, Robinson crumples printed images of his own face and fixes the distorted fragments to a wire-mesh cage. As he works, he sings *Smells Like Teen Spirit* and addresses himself through an absurd, self-deprecating monologue. He finally wears the construction, allowing his living face to disappear into and re-emerge among its damaged reproductions. The headpiece becomes the source for the two paintings on the following page.

[LINK TO FULL PERFORMANCE](#)



DA IST KEINE STELLE,
DIE DICH NICHT SIEHT (THOU SHALT COVER THY FACE)

OIL ON CANVAS, 2026 · 180 × 150 CM



FLOWERING IN BORROWED TIME
(THOU SHALT COVER THY FACE)

OIL ON CANVAS, 2025 · 50 × 41 CM

FLAMMARION

OIL ON CANVAS, 2022 · 200 × 120 CM

Flammarion takes its title from a wood engraving by an unknown artist first published in Camille Flammarion's 1888 *L'Atmosphère: météorologie populaire*. The image imitates a medieval visual language and is often mistaken for a medieval work. Its caption describes a missionary who finds the point where heaven and Earth touch; he pushes his head through a solid firmament to see the celestial machinery beyond.

Robinson reverses that movement. His head and arms emerge from a propped image of the cosmos into an ordinary room, while the rest of his body remains behind its surface. The observer is now caught inside the model he hoped to see through. Cast shadows and cut openings keep the construction visible. A picture promising access to the universe must accommodate the body looking.





LO CORPO DENTRO AL QUALE IO FACEA OMBRA
(THOU SHALT COVER THY FACE)

OIL ON CANVAS, 2026 · 100 × 90 CM

In *Purgatorio*, Dante panics when his living body casts a shadow and the dead Virgil's does not. Robinson builds Dante's ordered universe in cardboard and wears it. A cosmology designed to place every soul has to negotiate one living body.



HEAVEN, 2026

Live performance with artist-composed sound

7 min 50 sec

DeNode Foundation, Ghent, Belgium

13 February 2026

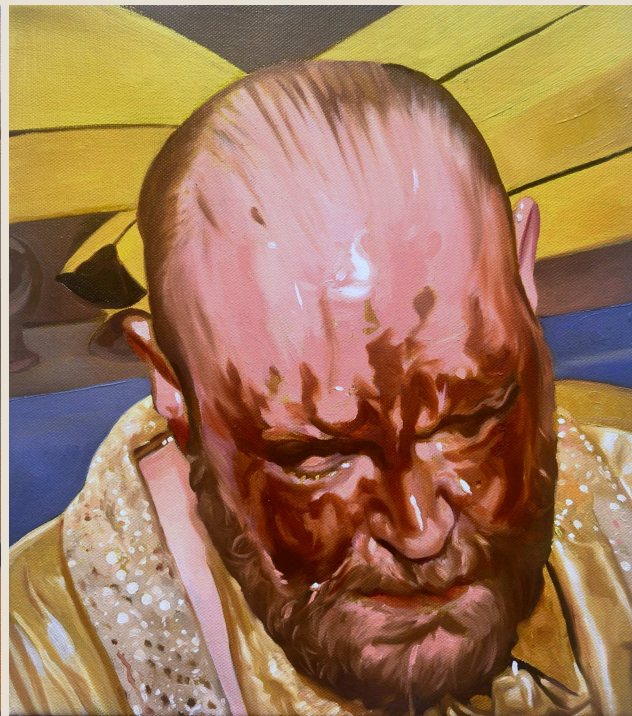
Presented at the opening of *People Ruin Paintings*

All three photographs document *Heaven*, the third and final performance in the *Hell / Purgatory / Heaven* trilogy.

Hell / Purgatory / Heaven distributed Dante's vertical cosmos across three floors of DeNode Foundation, turning a historical model of the universe into a place bodies could enter. In *Heaven*, a participant wearing Robinson's printed face coats his gold-suited body in strawberry sauce, chocolate sauce, whipped cream, eggs and flour. Coded as blood or wine, excrement and semen, the same matter carries sacrament, waste and sex at once. Abasement and exaltation occupy the same room.

The grotesque tarring-and-feathering gives way to a baptism Robinson undertakes himself. He enters a pool already occupied by masked doubles and inflatable bananas. Through their shared actions, these poor materials begin to behave like a world. Robinson eventually climbs out and leaves. The others remove their masks; in the final seconds, one raises his face again. The model outlasts his presence and remains available for another body to inhabit.

[LINK TO FULL PERFORMANCE](#)



HEAVEN I-III

TRIPTYCH, OIL ON CANVAS, 2026 · EACH PANEL 41.2 × 51.2 CM

Heaven I-III carries three photographic records of the ceremony through a second conversion. Oil turns sticky food into flesh and light, giving the provisional body a devotional gravity the live action could hold only briefly. The paintings preserve an event whose construction was visible from the beginning, yet make its transformation difficult to disbelieve.



LOS OJOS DESEADOS, QUE TENGO EN MIS ENTRAÑAS
DIBUJADOS
(THOU SHALT COVER THY FACE)
OIL ON CANVAS, 2026 · 130 × 100 CM



NEBUCHADNEZZAR
OIL ON CANVAS, 2023–2025 · 180 × 150 CM



LEVIATHAN THANGKA

OIL ON LINEN, 2021 · 200 × 320 CM

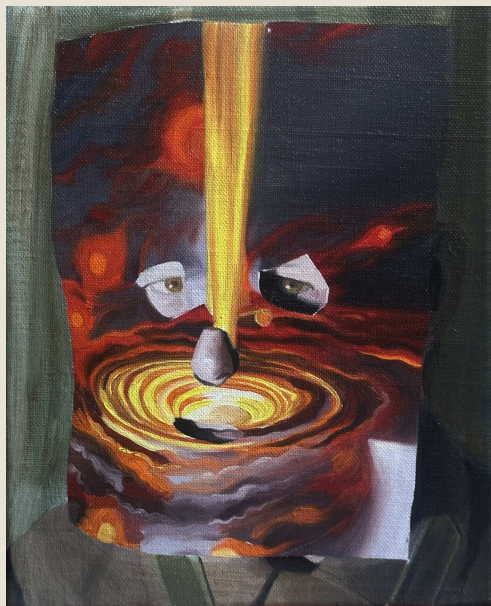
Leviathan Thangka rebuilds Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* around Robinson's body. Bosch's passage from Eden through earthly pleasure to inferno survives in grisaille, while its narrative is stalled. Robinson's face and limbs enter among the figures. One striped arm holds a knife over a pearly balloon, suspending the world at the instant before rupture. Black discs eclipse parts of all three panels. What they hide becomes as active as what remains visible.

The title joins Leviathan, the biblical sea monster, to a thangka, a Tibetan Buddhist painting used for contemplation. Robinson appears trapped inside this cosmology and large enough to carry it. Bosch's model of creation, desire and punishment becomes a world held together by the body that interrupts it.



THE EYE IS BURNING (THOU SHALT COVER THY FACE)

OIL ON CANVAS, 2026 · 150 × 120 CM



BLACK SUN (THOU SHALT COVER THY FACE)

OIL ON CANVAS, 2025 · 27 × 22 CM

In *The Eye is Burning*, Robinson wears a thangka of the Buddhist Wheel of Life: one body caught in all six realms, all six realms perched on one body. The title recalls the Fire Sermon, where the eye burns with desire, delusion, birth and death. Here, the eye looks back at us. *Black Sun* turns a black hole into a makeshift face, bringing inaccessible scale back to the body.



EARLY SEANCE OVER JAMES WEBB TELESCOPE

OIL ON CANVAS, 2025 · 100 × 90 CM

Early Seance Over James Webb Telescope brings together two attempts to reach the absent. A séance circle calls to the dead; the telescope receives light that has travelled for billions of years, from which scientists construct images of a past no observer can enter. Robinson imagined the sitters reaching further into space until something answered. The answer is Leviathan, the creature called up beneath darkened stars in Job, embodied by Robinson as a vast face.

The composition borrows the Master Control Program from *Tron*, which Robinson describes as “the final boss at the end of the universe.” The séance and telescope use different rules for deciding what is real. Their collision gives ritual form to one of astronomy’s strangest facts: seeing farther means seeing earlier. Light arrives from an unreachable past, and something in the image answers.



FLOWERHEAD, 2024

Durational performance for camera, colour and sound, 30 min 44 sec

Artist's studio, Worcester, UK

During his closeted adolescence, Robinson picked flowers around Worcester while imagining a life he could not yet live openly. In *Flowerhead*, he returns to that private ritual with his mother. Half-blinded by a wire armature, he must follow her verbal directions as he threads flowers from the family garden across his face. She can guide him but cannot touch the construction. Their dependence and frustration become a difficult rite of kinship. The resulting painting carries this temporary body into oil.

[LINK TO FULL PERFORMANCE](#)



A LONGING FOR THE LONGING (THOU SHALT COVER
THY FACE)

OIL ON CANVAS, 2026 · 150 × 120 CM