

# CHARLIE SMITH london Ltd.

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Wed-Sat 11am-6pm or by appointment

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## THE BEARD

Curated by Kiera Bennett & Alex Gene Morrison

**Paul Becker**  
**Kiera Bennett**  
**Dan Coombs**  
**Alex Gene Morrison**

Private View | First Thursday  
Thursday February 3<sup>rd</sup> 6.30pm – 8.30pm

Exhibition Dates  
Friday February 4<sup>th</sup> – Saturday February 26<sup>th</sup> 2011

Gallery Hours  
Wednesday – Saturday 11am – 6pm or by appointment

Address  
CHARLIE SMITH london, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 336 Old St, London, EC1V 9DR

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This show brings together four painters who make work that is highly individual yet is anchored to the familiar through the conscious referencing of similar archetypes. Each of these artists creates psychologically charged imagery that collectively reference personal experience, heightened states of consciousness, dreams and fiction. All four artists embrace the power of painting; its history; its materiality and its unflinching ability to effectively transform complex thought into form.

These artists' paths have crossed at various points over the last twenty years or so, from Coombs and Bennett studying at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in the early nineties, to Bennett and Morrison studying together at the Royal College of Art. Bennett and Morrison then went on to meet Becker whilst being involved in running the Rockwell project space where all four artists showed work but never as a group.

The show takes its title from the accompanying short story written by Paul Becker. The content of the story is analogous to aspects of how all four artists approach making work. *Alex Gene Morrison*

Please contact gallery for images and further information

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## THE BEARD

*By Paul Becker*

*When the Reverend Patrick Brontë, wishing to know more about the minds of his six motherless children than he had hitherto discovered, placed each one behind a mask to make them speak with less timidity than before, he gave to the three sisters who survived the blessed thrill of anonymity. To speak aloud and yet remain, as it would seem, unknown, to hide identity behind a hollow face; criticism, mockery, reproach – these things could not touch the wearer of the mask.*

*The Infernal World of Branwell Brontë by Daphne du Maurier*

It was blind luck that I saw him at all. He was half buried in the sand of a dry riverbed and only just alive. I strapped him on to the back of the second pony and we headed out East. He neither woke nor moved a finger for six days. On the seventh there was another sandstorm and so I had us holed up in the back of a cave for as long as it took to wait it out. I lit a fire and made some coffee. It was difficult to breathe; the sand filled the

air like thick sea fog, even back there in the cave, and as the storm screamed around us it felt for all the world as if we lay in the lower deck of a ship, all hope abandoned, at the mercy of a great typhoon.

It was then he finally stirred. He looked wildly around for a moment, breaking the dry crust of sand and sleep around his eyes, then clutched at the small canvas bag he had attached to his belt. He paid me no mind until the idea of water occurred to him. I passed him the canteen. Then he asked for some of the coffee. His voice was queer indeed, it seemed like an echo from another part of the room and...those eyes! They were of a hue dark and black enough to give a man the impression of staring down into a borehole. His face: that sickly, yellow parchment skin gave him the look of a revenant, a reluctant Lazarus. Pretty soon he started to ramble. My presence was not the cause, rather he was explicating some great principle to himself. I admit that he was making me jittery and after upwards of an hour of his meandering I asked him to either hold his tongue and let me sleep or at least to try and speak plainly to one who had only recently saved his life. He turned that black hole stare upon me.

"I will tell you then since you ask it, of the journey I began that finally set me in your path. What we did, some of our people said, was little more than plain travesty. They said that the God, the idea of whom we had besmirched, would soon be back to play his wrath about our heads. It was we who had moved this Colossus into place, watched it grow into the great behemoth that it became. But when all that is left of a God is the space where once it slept, what better way to understand it, to judge its systems for oneself, other than by the yardstick of its nothingness - its remains, the crumbs from its table, its dry scrapings of dead skin, the plucked tufts of its hair. Detritus".

I asked him to stop a moment. Steadily his dried-up visage had taken on an ever more sickening look as he told his rambling tale and I would have him rest and drink a little water. He said he could not bear to eat though I offered him a bite. When I caught his eye, somehow I felt the tale was all that was keeping him. I let him talk on.

"Some of us felt that something must be done despite the fear of the rest. We knew that the powder which had fallen from under the toenails of the Colossus contained all the clues we needed, the very blueprints of its destruction. We knew an effigy had to be fashioned from these remains that would be an embodiment of all our doubts, a mouse to bring down a mountain, small enough to hold and feel between our hands. It would be fashioned into a disguise, a mask of wisdom, a symbol of lost knowledge. We would make ourselves beards from the scattered dust of Colossus. They alone would hold all the answers. Emblematic of the last of the elders, those with cognisance of the lost arts: the makers of images who had at first been ignored and then trampled upon by the crowd when usurped by the great God. And so we fashioned our beards. Look here! See!" Still holding my gaze, he leant over and with his palsied fingers, drew a hairy mass of fluff from his pouch. "Born from the dust of failure, our beards stared back sightless, accused with no tongue and were undaunted by thoughts of Colossus, even with no head to hang upon!"

"But what were they for?" I asked. "And what is this Colossus you speak of?" The man could talk no more, had used up the last of himself in the telling. I saw myself reflected for a moment in his eyes as they stared out black into the storm. He only paused to drink down a last gulp of cold, sandy coffee before he fell into sleep. In the morning, when I had brushed the sand from my eyes, I saw that he had died.

I buried him there, just outside the cave. The storm had blown itself out but there was still enough wind to keep puffing the sand from his face and carcass as quickly as I tried to cover it. I took the canvas pouch that held the beard from out of his last grasp. I tried it on over my ears but the wind took it and it rolled off amongst the dunes.