

SMALL WORLDS

TOM DE FRESTON



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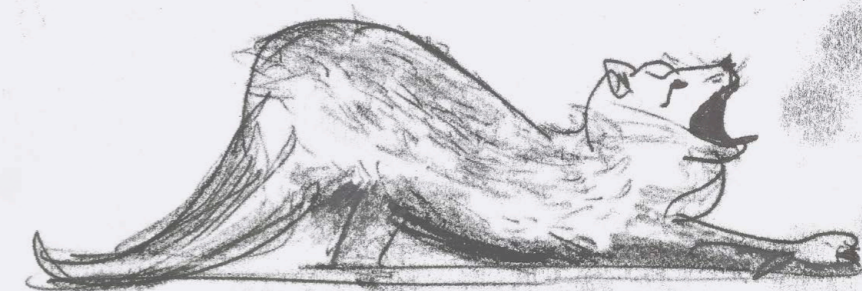
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Cover image: *Skellig (Rise)*, 2022, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium,
56 x 80 cm

Right:
Detail of drawing (24) from *Leila and the Blue Fox*, 2021, Monotype on paper, 24 x 32 cm



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No 20 Arts is delighted to present **SMALL WORLDS**, the first exhibition of Tom de Freston's drawings. Printing, collaging, maquettes, and painting are combined with interplays of scale and texture to give each finished work depth and intrigue. De Freston's fierce belief in an image's ability to communicate complex narrative is on full display here, made no less complex by the size, simplicity of line, and colour palette of his works.

Long an admirer of Maurice Sendak, Jon Klassen, and Leonora Carrington, as well as having built a career around the construction of multimedia worlds, it is little wonder that de Freston has turned his hand to illustration in the past five years. The limited-edition aluminium bound prints and drawings come from three illustrated children's books. Both ***Julia and the Shark*** and ***Leila and the Blue Fox*** are best-selling, award-winning collaborations with de Freston's wife, the novelist Kiran Millwood Hargrave. The other book is a 25th anniversary illustrated edition of the iconic ***Skellig*** by David Almond. De Freston's drawings are displayed alongside works from ***FROM DARKNESS***, a collaboration with the Syrian writer Professor Ali Souleman and documentary film-maker Mark Jones.

These are works that illuminate rather than illustrate the texts they accompany and, shown in isolation, their power is evident. Populated by the uncanny, the sublime, and the strange, they act not as mirrors but windows to the text, opening out onto wider vistas. As de Freston himself says, these works exist not to “[lock] down a reader's own version, but rather [expand] the architecture of the spaces they might enter.”

We invite you into these spaces, these windows into small but mighty worlds.

Skellig

David Almond, 25th Anniversary Edition
Hachette, 2023
With illustrations by Tom de Freston
Design by Alison Padley

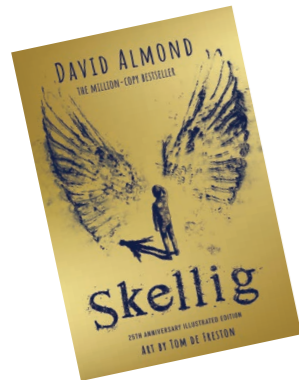


“Skellig has been living in the dusty, dark, expansive spaces of readers’ imaginations for 25 years. It is a book of rare magic, full of wonder and complex psychological landscapes. To make artwork for this book is a risk, as the last thing a reader wants is for the images to steal the Skellig each of us has created. So I approached it with the spirit of trying to open the gaps further, to lean into the ambiguities. It is a deep honour to be given this responsibility, and I hope I have not in any way locked down a reader’s own version, but rather expanded the architecture of the spaces they might enter.”

– Tom de Freston

When a move to a new house coincides with his baby sister’s illness, Michael’s world seems suddenly lonely and uncertain. Then, one Sunday afternoon, he stumbles into the old, ramshackle garage of his new home, and finds something magical. A strange creature – part owl, part angel, a being who needs Michael’s help if he is to survive.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of Carnegie’s publication of **Skellig**, this bestselling story about love, loss and hope appears as an illustrated edition for the very first time. To depict this much-loved story, de Freston has accumulated the grime of the garage: dust, feathers, grass and weeds shroud and shadow each image. Look closely and you will see fingerprints begin to merge with wings – everything part-human, part-creature, wholly uncanny. For the character Mina’s sketches, de Freston filters his gaze through that of a child, arguably reaching at the purest and sweetest images of the exhibition.



Top: Detail of **Skellig (Exhausted)**, 2022, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm
Opposite page: **Skellig (Loft)**, 2022, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm





Skellig (Dream), 2022, Limited edition print on Hahnemühle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80cm



Skellig (Shadow dream), 2022, Limited edition print on Hahnemühle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm

Skellig (Cary), 2022. Limited edition print on Hahnemühle German etching paper bound to aluminum, 56 x 80 cm





Fox Fishing, 2021, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm

Leila and the Blue Fox

Kiran Milwood Hargrave
Hachette, 2022
With illustrations by Tom de Freston
Design by Alison Padley



"Paint is the perfect medium for replicating ice – it records time, holding in its layers every impression, every mark left, even if it is then covered, nothing is fully erased. It shifts, breaks, freezes. The perfection of a blank page interrupted by oils and inks, allowed to bloom into organic shapes that read as clouds or icebergs. And then, collaged in, are figures: of Fox, of people, of polar bears. In many ways these images are about trespass, ecological change, and how our perception of the land is limited compared its perception of us."

– Tom de Freston

Fox wakes, and begins to walk. *Leila and the Blue Fox* is based on the true story of a young Arctic fox, who walked from Norway to Canada – a distance of more than two thousand miles – over sea ice. The book is the second collaboration between de Freston and his wife, award-winning children's author Kiran Milwood Hargrave. De Freston's images work with Milwood Hargrave's words to rewild our relationship to animals. *Leila and the Blue Fox* portrays nature's ability to heal itself, beyond the need for human interference.

Fox, the central protagonist, is small and often lost-looking within this sublime expanse. To avoid anthropomorphising her, de Freston worked directly from photographs, creating monoprints and sketches to scatter across the Arctic landscape. The results are images of impassive beauty, that play with scale and texture to create the fragile strength of the Arctic and its animals.





Ice Drift, 2021, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm



Fox and Bear, 2021, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm



Fox Dream, 2021, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm

Julia and the Shark

Kiran Milwood Hargrave
Hachette, 2021
With illustrations by Tom de Freston
Design by Alison Padley



*“Days before lockdown there was a fire in my studio that destroyed twelve years worth of work. From the burnt out husk I rescued burnt frames, bags of ash, fragments of destroyed artworks. Much of the artwork for **Julia and the Shark** was made using these materials, as an act of mourning, transformation and repair. It reflects the central message of the book, that even in the deepest darkness there is always the light of hope.”*

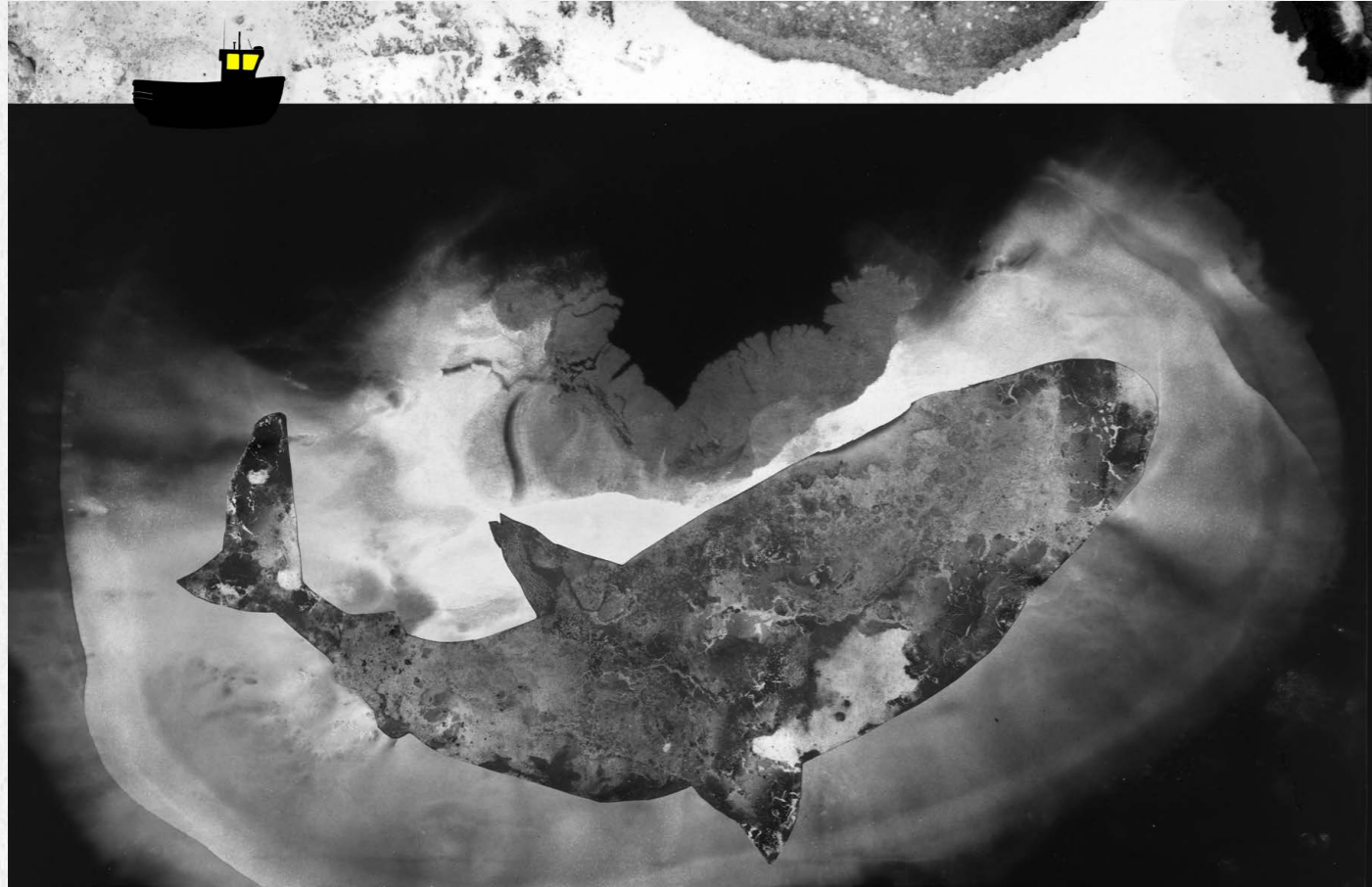
– Tom de Freston

When her father is required to repair an old lighthouse on a remote island, Julia finds herself on a strange and magical summer holiday. Her mother becomes increasingly determined to find the great Greenland shark – an awesome yet elusive creature that soon fills Julia’s thoughts as well.

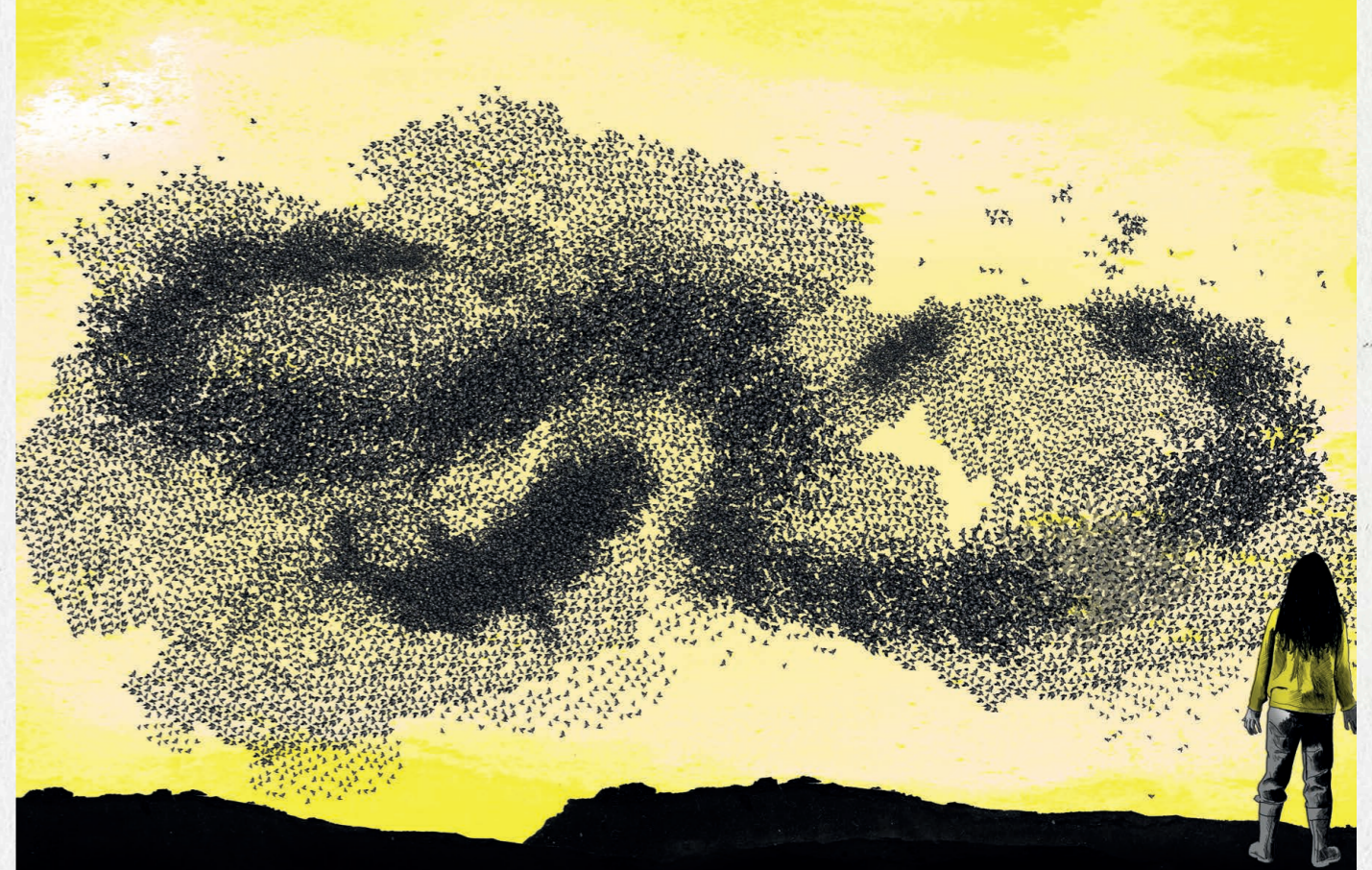
With the breath-taking black, white and yellow illustrations in **Julia and the Shark**, created using the ashes from a 2020 fire that destroyed de Freston’s studio, Julia and the Shark is both a testament to artistic rebirth and an exquisite reflection on family, science and the fragile yet sublime beauty of the environment.



Lighthouse, 2020, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm



Julia and the Shark, 2020, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm



Julia and the Murmuration, 2020, Limited edition print on Hahnemuhle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm



Julia's Dream, 2020, Limited edition print on Hahnemühle German etching paper bound to aluminium, 56 x 80 cm

FROM DARKNESS

“For the past four years, I have been collaborating with the Syrian writer Professor Ali Souleman and documentary film-maker Mark Jones. Ali lost his sight to a bomb blast in Syria in 1997 and we were attempting to translate his experiences of war and displacement into a collection of paintings. To make the unseen seen. Then, a month before the first lockdown, a fire gutted my studio, destroying twelve years’ worth of work in a matter of hours. Amongst the burnt debris, I had a moment of instinct: this would not be an end, but a new beginning.

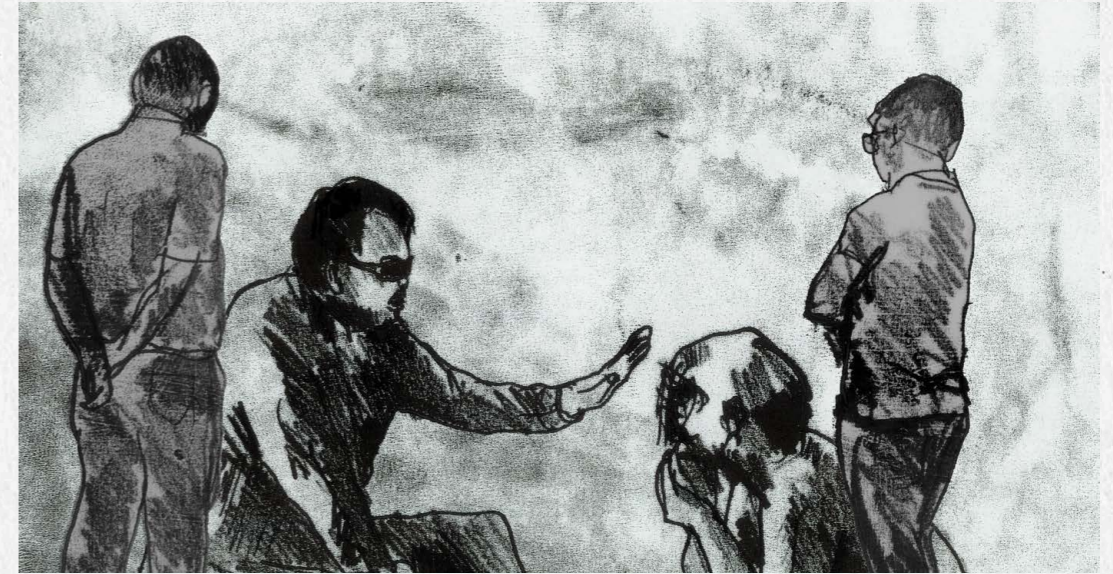


The paintings in **FROM DARKNESS** are the result of an entirely new approach. Ash and debris have been mixed into paint, embedded into resin-covered surfaces. Works are imprinted with hands and feet, outlined absences which speak of a past presence. Grids are laid down, stencilled, sprayed to form cumulative spaces and suggestions of architectural interiors. Power washers have been taken to the surface, revealing hidden passages of paint. It’s an approach to mark-making akin to exploration, to looking to map new terrains.

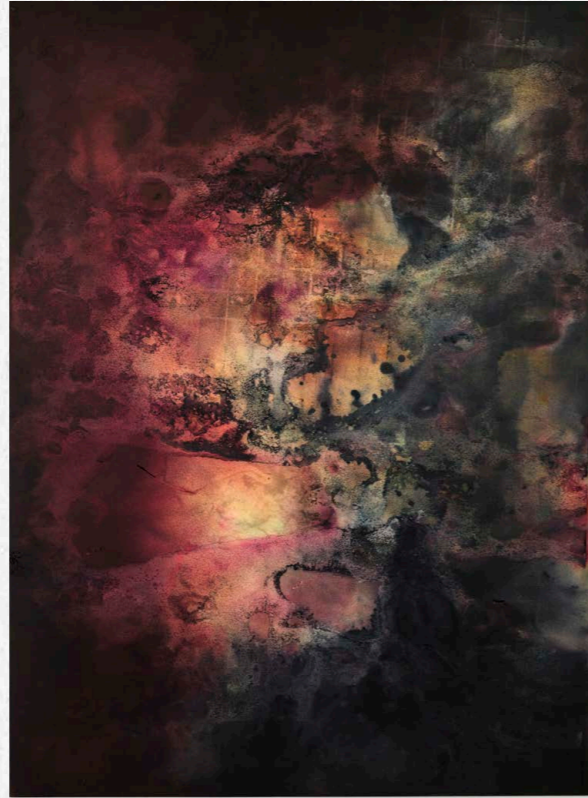
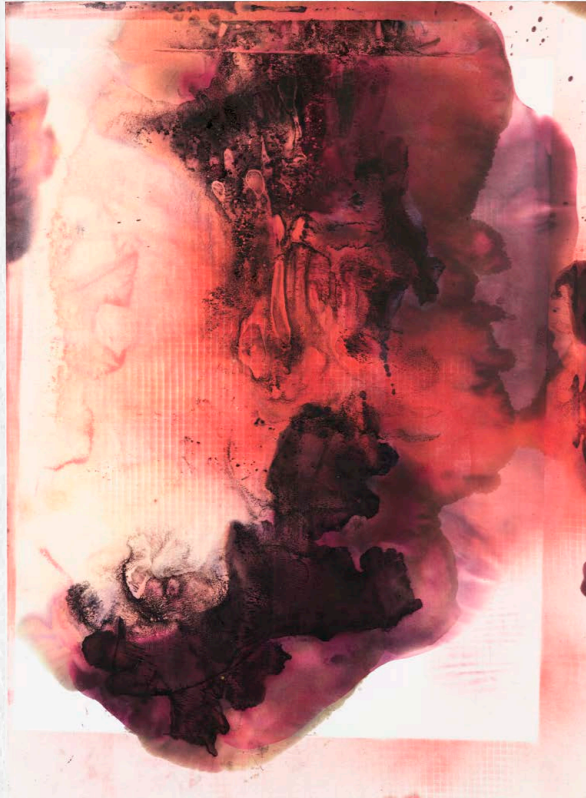
They are paintings which invite us to enter them, to step inside the canvas, or at the least to occupy the gap between. As such they are invitations into psychological hinterlands, awaiting your arrival.”

– Tom de Freston

Top: Bespoke drawings for the forthcoming feature length documentary, **INSIGHT**, by Mark Jones.



Top: Bespoke drawing for the forthcoming feature length documentary, **INSIGHT**, by Mark Jones.
Bottom: Film still from **INSIGHT** by Mark Jones



Left: *Mirror*, 2021, Mixed media on paper, 76 x 55.7 cm, 97 x 77 cm (framed)

Right: *Submerge*, 2021, Mixed media on paper, 76 x 55.7 cm, 97 x 77 cm (framed)

Bespoke drawings for the forthcoming feature length documentary, *INSIGHT*, by Mark Jones.

About Tom de Freston



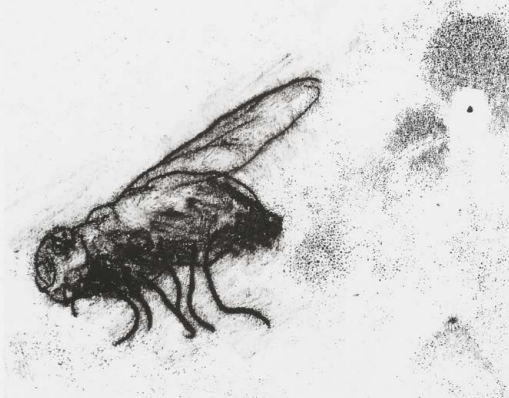
Tom de Freston's practice is dedicated to the construction of multimedia worlds, combining painting, film, and performance into immersive visceral narratives. His work is exhibited widely. He has held various prestigious residencies and fellowships, including the inaugural Creative Fellowship at Birmingham University, the Levy Plumb Artist in Residence at Cambridge University, and a Leverhulme Artistic Residency. He is currently Artistic Director of Medicine Unboxed.

Julia and the Fox, de Freston's second collaboration with his wife, novelist Kiran Milwood Hargrave, was listed as one of The Guardian's best children's books of 2022. De Freston's debut narrative non-fiction book, *Wreck* was published by Granta in March 2022. Forthcoming publications include *Strange Bodies*, a non-fiction collaboration with Milwood Hargrave, as well as the illustrated 25th anniversary edition of David Almond's *Skellig*.

Right: *Bluebottle*, 2022, monotype on paper, 29.7 x 42 cm

Exhibition History Highlights

- 2023 - *After Before*, No 20 Arts, London, UK
- 2022 - *From Darkness*, No 20 Arts, London, UK
- 2019 - *Truthtellers*, King's College London, UK
- 2018 - Lush HQ, London, UK
 - *Demons Land*, Old Fire Station, Oxford, UK
- 2017 - *Demons Land*, Stowe National Trust, UK
 - *Demons Land*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK
- 2016 - *Artist Bedrooms* (permanent installation), Battersea Arts Centre, London, UK
 - *OE*, 47/49 Tanner Street, London
 - *RSC (The Other Place)*, Birmingham University Creative Festival, UK
 - *Shakespeare's Dead*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK
- 2014 - *Orpheus and the Minotaur*, Bresse Little, London, UK
 - *Frontiers (Medicine Unboxed)*, Parabola Arts Centre, Cheltenham, UK
- 2013 - *Charnel House*, Bresse Little, London, UK
 - *Paintings After Shakespeare*, The Globe Theatre, London, UK
 - *Voice (Medicine Unboxed)*, Parabola Arts Centre, Cheltenham, UK
- 2012 - *Scavengers*, Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Tokyo
 - *On Theatre*, Bresse Little Gallery, London, UK
 - *Shakespeare Paintings*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK
 - *The Golem*, Centre for Recent Drawing, London, UK
- 2011 - *On Falling*, Frameless Gallery, London, UK
 - *Scavengers*, British Shakespeare Association Conference, Cambridge, UK
 - *Scavengers*, Birthplace Trust, Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK
 - *Deposition* (permanent installation), Christ's College Chapel, Cambridge, UK



Awards and Residencies

2013–2018 – Artistic Director, *Medicine Unboxed*

2016 – Birmingham University Creative Fellow

– Saboteur Award winner for *A Fool's Worlds*

– Arts Council GFA for OE exhibition and performances

– AHRC/TORCH funding for *Demons Land*

2012 – Artist in Residence, *The Expansionists*, Whitstable

2010 – Leverhulme Artist in Residence, Cambridge University

2008 – Levy Plumb Visual Arts Residency, Christ's College



Left: Detail of drawing (25) from *Leila and the Blue Fox*, 2021, monotype on paper, 24 x 32 cm

Right: Detail of *Form*, 2022, Mixed media on paper, 21 x 14.85 cm





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