

Harry Spike

Inspired by the rugged landscapes of his youth in the Peak District, Harry Spike’s sensual, dreamlike canvases bring a mature lens to childhood insecurities



This page and previous spread:
archive Helmut Lang T-shirt
and archive Margiela jeans
Dossier, leather and metal
buckle belt Six 95, Harry's
own jewellery and shoes.
This page: wool hoodie Jakes



Growing up in the Peak District instilled a lifelong love of nature in Harry Spike. “Every weekend, my siblings and I were dragged up a hill, whatever the weather,” he remembers. “When you’re that age you complain a lot, but I’m so grateful to my mum for choosing to raise us there. Hiking is now such a big part of my adult life.”

Spike’s debut solo exhibition at Cob Gallery in London this spring, curated by Eva Karkut-Law and titled *Dig*, took inspiration from the Peak District – its terrain, folklore and history. These otherworldly paintings see elusive male subjects – most of them nude – in various states of reverie, slipping in and out of lush, full-bodied landscapes.

“My paintings always have figures crouching, leaning over or bending towards the earth, and I’ve never known if they’re digging something up or burying something,” says Spike, in reference to the show’s title. Jungian psychology, a 20th-century therapeutic approach focused on integrating the conscious and unconscious mind, is also a key influence. “There’s a different plane that I can tap into when I’m working, and that has something to do with Jung’s teachings,” says the artist, who has kept a dream diary for years. “The word ‘dig’ kept coming up in my journals, in reference to digging into the unconscious mind.”

Having grown up in a creative family – his mother is an artist, as is his twin sister – Spike moved to London after earning a BFA

in painting and printmaking from Glasgow School of Art in 2018, later completing a postgraduate programme at the Royal Drawing School in 2020. These days, he splits his time between making art in his studio on Hackney Road and pulling pints at the French House, an iconic Soho pub frequented by British artists Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud in the 1950s and 60s. Its atmosphere is just as creatively nourishing today. “If it’s a quiet night, we talk about our work, and everyone really encourages each other,” says Spike of his fellow bartenders, who took part in a staff exhibition, *Half Pints, Full Talents* (which got Spike noticed by Cob Gallery). “There’s a lot of queer people there too – you feel really safe.”

While Spike’s paintings are not explicitly about queerness, the artist’s own sexuality seeps into his canvases, with male figures kissing, embracing or collapsing into one another. These tender, gently erotic scenes are paired with the abundant landscapes of his youth, in earthy colour palettes inspired by the mossy greens and muted ochres of its gritstone moorlands and rolling limestone dales.

“Going back to the countryside can be a difficult thing for queer people,” says Spike, who visits home regularly. “I often wonder if the work is me trying to reconcile this newfound confidence that I have as a gay man and the shame and insecurities that I had growing up in that landscape. I’m learning to be more comfortable.”

