

THOMAS HJELM
CONSUMED



SOUVENIR 438 SPACE

9 - 22 OCTOBER 2026

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(Swallow the Sky)

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ENQUIRIES

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FOREWORD

by Nicolas Hemming-Brown

Cast adrift on the endless tide, we are intimately connected to our immediate surroundings and totally detached from them. We are enveloped by blue above and below, isolated yet identifiable by our reality and sense of being. Slowly the person fades. Soon there is nothing left but continuity between this small and that big. We have become an indistinguishable participant, absorbed into the expanse.

Digital technology has provided us with the impression of both escape and connection, but has instead left us stranded. We exist in this ever-increasing netherworld, where we are familiar with total strangers, and what we think is real can all too often be discredited.

Within this new social context, these pictures are catharsis. The layered barriers and the expanse beyond are a challenge to the viewer, to enjoy a world away from the digital. To this end they are real and present and physical and textured, and are the product of a finely wrought craft. The points of reference are decades long, assembled from the analogue sediment of image making, and they become an experience of time, where before and now can co-exist; where the sky meets our surface, where above and below cease to be differentiated. These paintings question what intimacy is, and they confront us with questions of participation and complicity; questions of memory, or belief. They are moments taking place at that crossing point between oneness and isolation, where one willingly surrenders and is washed over.

We typically acknowledge our own permanence through sense and desire, understanding the immediate world around us, and how we want to navigate it. We equally seek destruction through an indulgence of these very same senses; sex, drugs, god, death are all escapes from the solidity of ourselves with varying degrees of finality. They exist in a close parallel, from time to time changing course to intertwine. The release from within to without therefore is growth. The physical integrity of being at these points becomes porous, as life consciousness and interconnectedness seep through the boundaries between us and not-us. We leave behind something small to become something big. We can also achieve the same sense of escape by looking backwards or forwards to escape, variously mis-remembering and hoping.

These works are an examination of these very real, very dissociative pursuits. Who we are in relation to the physical world of now, and what our connection to the physical world of then is. Why do we want escape, how do we do it, and what does it look like when we have.

These pictures look out at the sky through the clouds, and then we look back down to earth, hoping to find ourselves. They are reflections on what it means to be alive and making something real.

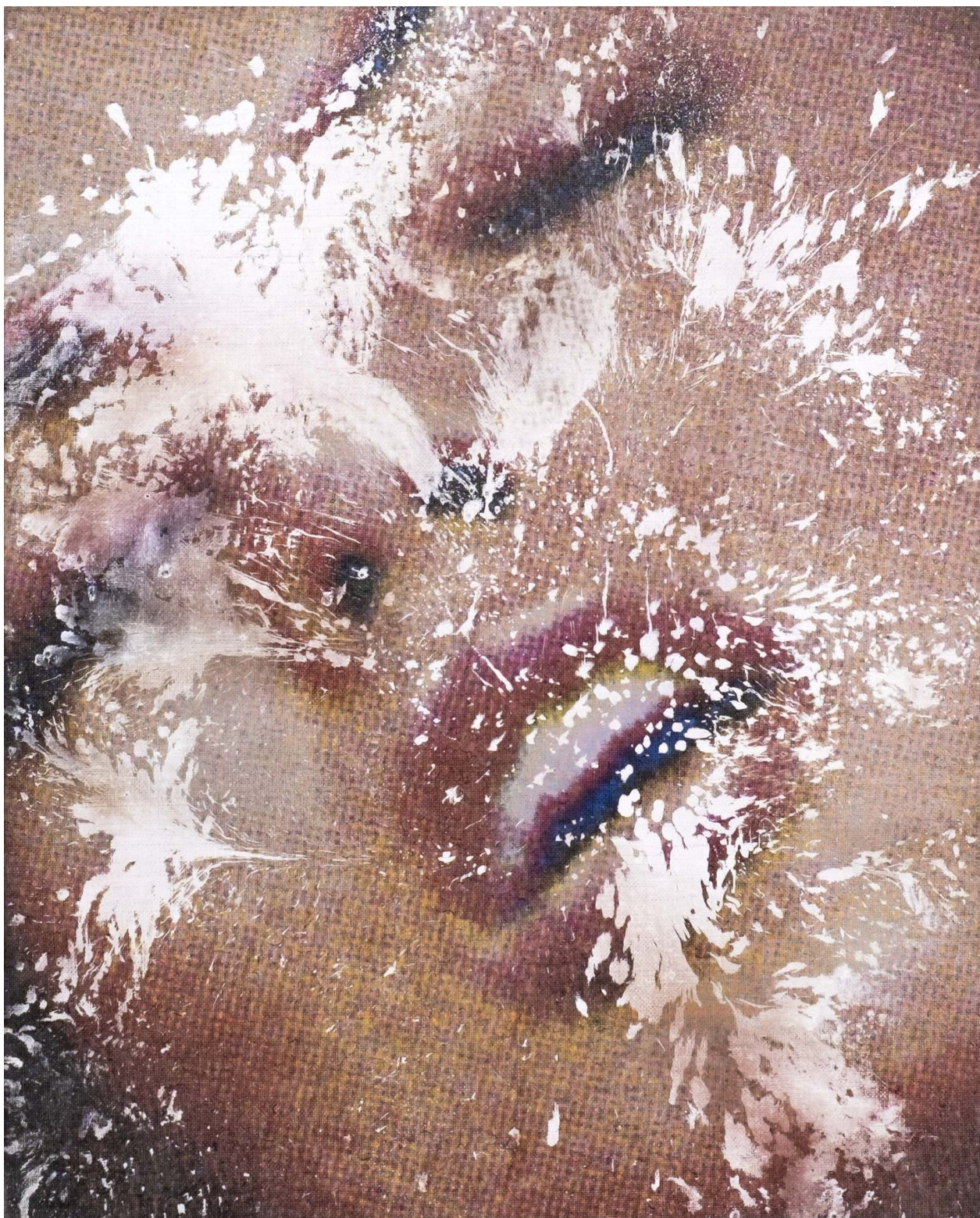


BLINK OF AN EYE

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

40 x 110 cm



BLOW UP

Thomas Hjelm, 2026
Paint and inkjet on linen
40 x 60 cm



BREATHE

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

90 x 150 cm



CONSUMED

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

110 x 150 cm



CRASH

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

170 x 130 cm



DRIFT

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

110 x 150 cm



ENGULF

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

130 x 170 cm



IGNITE

Thomas Hjelm, 2026
Paint and inkjet on linen
40 x 60 cm



INSOMNIAC DREAMER

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

110 x 150 cm

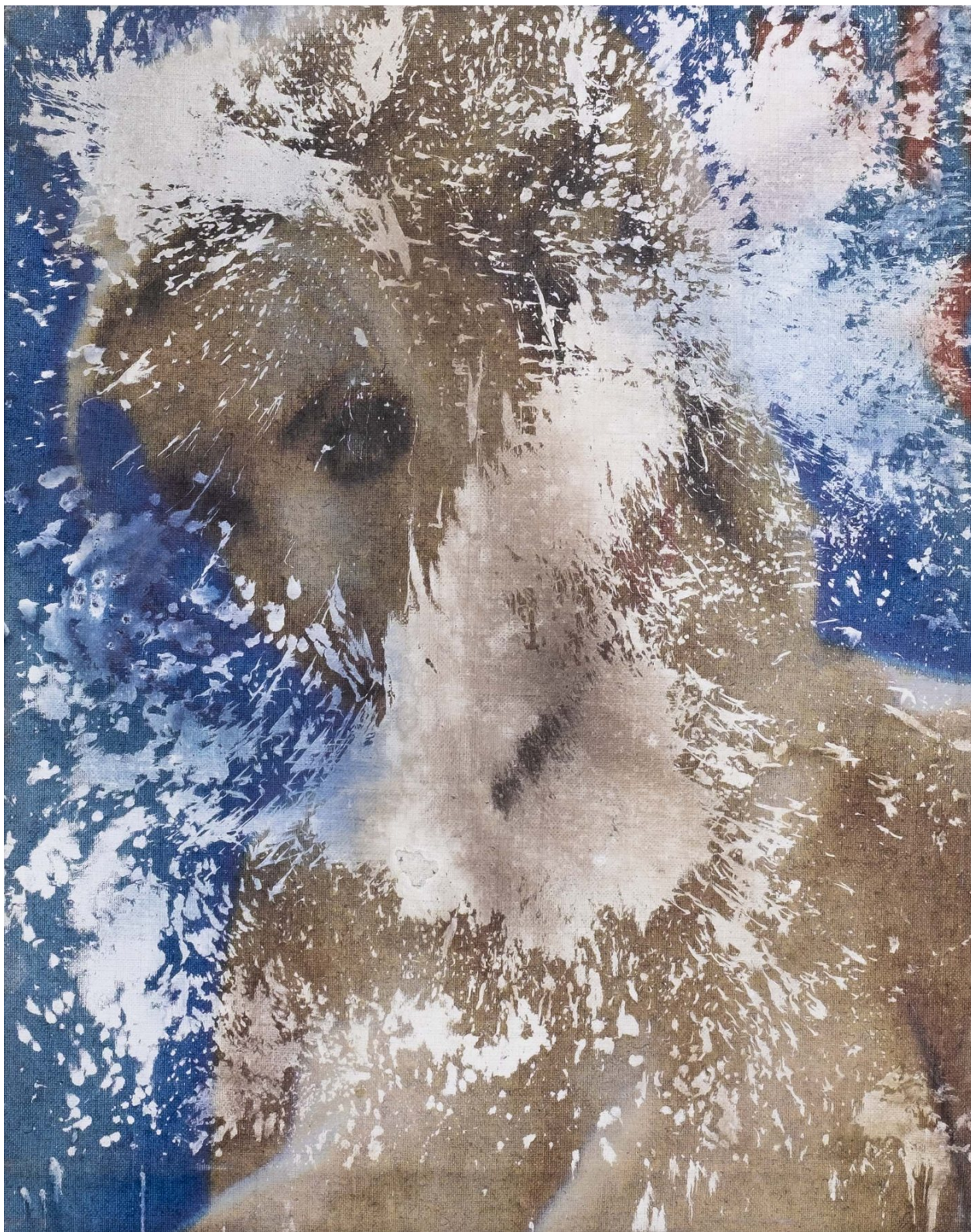


MOONSHINE

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

90 x 150 cm



SIREN 1

Thomas Hjelm, 2026
Paint and inkjet on linen
40 x 60 cm



SIREN 2

Thomas Hjelm, 2026
Paint and inkjet on linen
40 x 60 cm



SIREN 3

Thomas Hjelm, 2026
Paint and inkjet on linen
40 x 60 cm



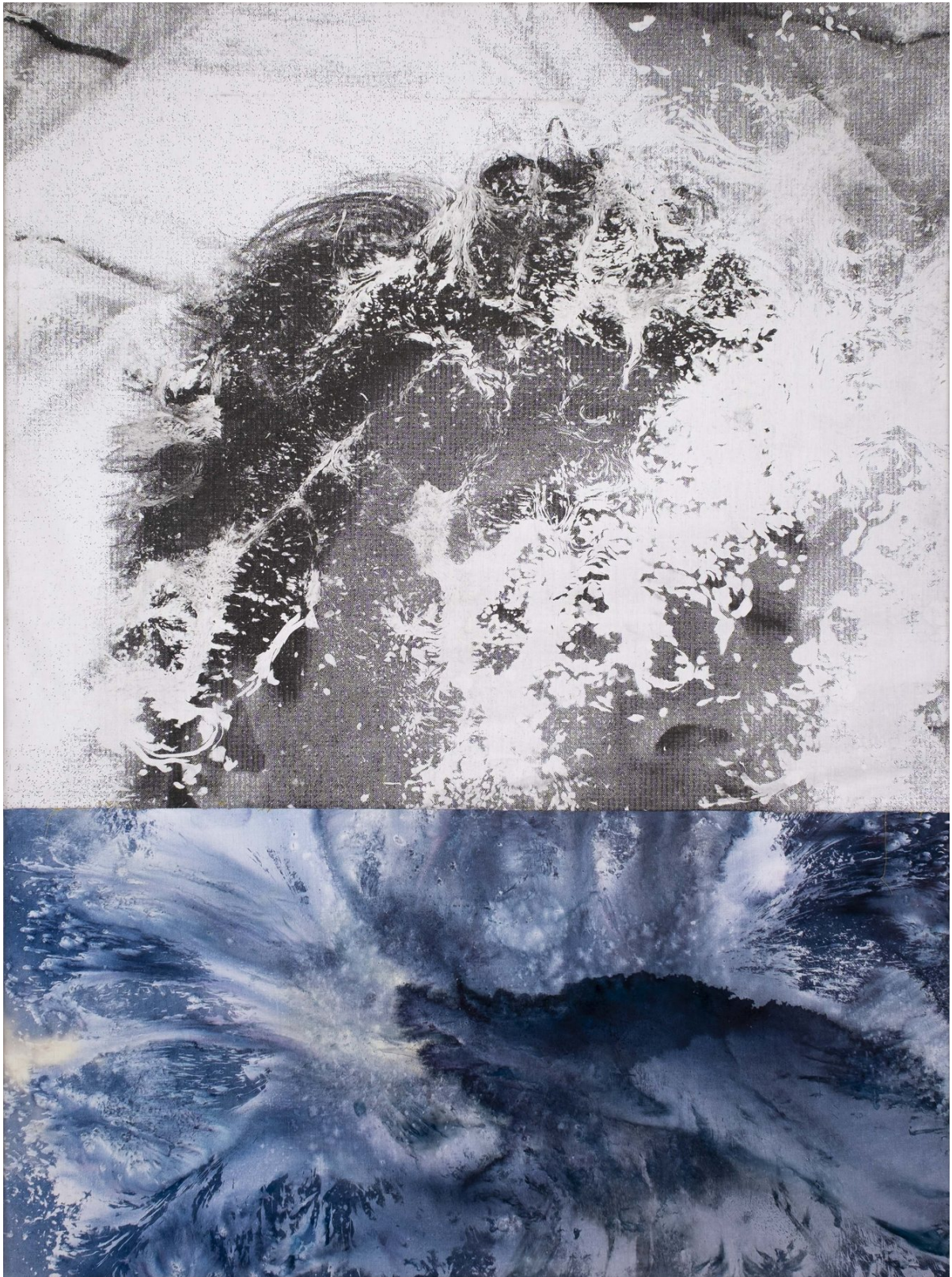
SIRENS

Thomas Hjelm, 2026
Paint and inkjet on linen
40 x 60 cm



SWALLOW

Thomas Hjelm, 2026
Paint and inkjet on linen
40 x 60 cm



SWALLOW THE SKY

Thomas Hjelm, 2026

Paint and inkjet print on linen

110 x 150 cm

PRESS RELEASE

CONSUMED (Swallow the Sky)

A solo exhibition by Thomas Hjelm

Presented in correlation with Frieze London

Souvenir 438 Space is proud to present *Consumed (Swallow The Sky)*, a solo exhibition by London-based artist Thomas Hjelm in correlation with Frieze London. The exhibition brings together a new body of work that examines surrender in its many forms: to desire, to nature, and to another person. At its centre is the idea that surrender can become a route to freedom — a moment in which the boundary of the self dissolves.

Consumed explores the sensation of being completely enveloped by your surroundings: lost in desire, absorbed by nature, or staring at the sky until the distinction between yourself and your surroundings begins to collapse. Hjelm's paintings occupy the space between intimacy and vastness, where the self becomes both intensely present and almost absent.

The imagery draws directly from archival call cards, the small advertisements once found in London telephone booths that promised connection, pleasure, and escape in a single glance. Hjelm strips these images of their original context, isolating their emotional charge: figures caught in states of ecstasy, eyes closed, mouths open in surrender. Desire is present, but its object is withheld. The space between anticipation and release becomes central to the exhibition.

That tension is set against recurring motifs of the sky and the sea: vast, borderless, and constant. Where the figures strain towards contact, the sky offers another form of surrender — one without an object of desire, where the self simply dissipates. Across the exhibition, sea and clouds, body and atmosphere begin to merge, until the distinction between figure and environment becomes increasingly unstable.

The show's emotional register draws on the Romantic sublime and Nietzsche's reading of intensity and surrender as forms of vitality rather than loss of control. Together, they frame surrender as an active act of release: a willingness to let go of the need to interpret, possess, or control an experience while it is happening. Hjelm builds this language from an archive of call cards, pages from *Playgirl* magazine, self-portraits, and photographs of the sky. Reworked, layered and abraded, these images become fragments of memory, suspended between recognition and disappearance.

Technically, the exhibition marks a significant shift in Hjelm's practice. This year, he has moved towards a more flattened surface, moving away from the physical layering, tearing and reconstruction that defined the depth of his earlier work. In *Consumed*, depth is instead created through the accumulation, repetition and manipulation of imagery. The result is a more distilled technical language, where physical intervention gives way to the gradual erosion and transformation of the image over time.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Thomas Hjelm (b. 1992) is a half-Swedish, London-born and raised artist whose structural artworks combine Painting and Print. Highly commended for the Ashurst Emerging Artist Prize, Hjelm exhibited and curated at Saatchi Gallery's *London Grads Now* in 2021 and was selected as one of Saatchi Art's Global Rising Stars in 2022. He continues to build on his contribution to the London art scene through HBH Gallery, the collaborative gallery he co-founded, which champions emerging and mid-career talent. He completed a Foundation and BA in Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art, followed by a Master's degree at the Royal College of Art.

Hjelm's practice is concerned with what survives when an image is subjected to time, repetition, and material pressure. Working from a personal archive shaped by his experience of growing up in London, alongside commercial print, urban ephemera, and weathered advertisements, he treats this imagery as a language of his own, continually reworked rather than simply referenced. Through repeated abrasion, layering and reconstruction, images break down and reform, leaving behind a trace carried by memory beyond the original image.

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