The Top Exhibitions To See In London: January 2026

By Tabish Khan

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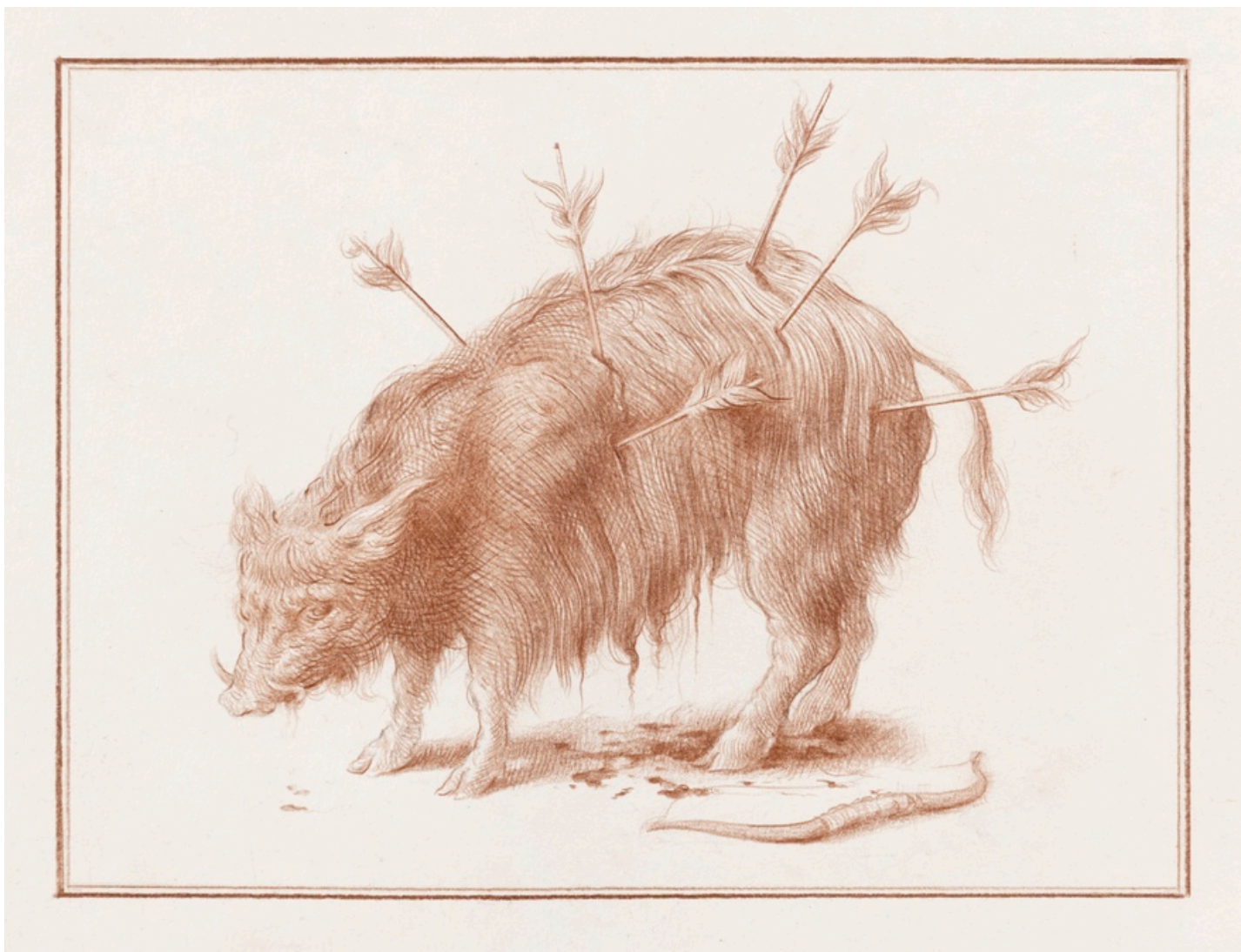
Our pick of the best exhibitions to see in London's galleries and museums opening in January 2026. Check out our preview of 2026 for more great exhibitions to see later in the year.

Fantastical worlds: Sverre Malling at Kristin Hjellegjerde

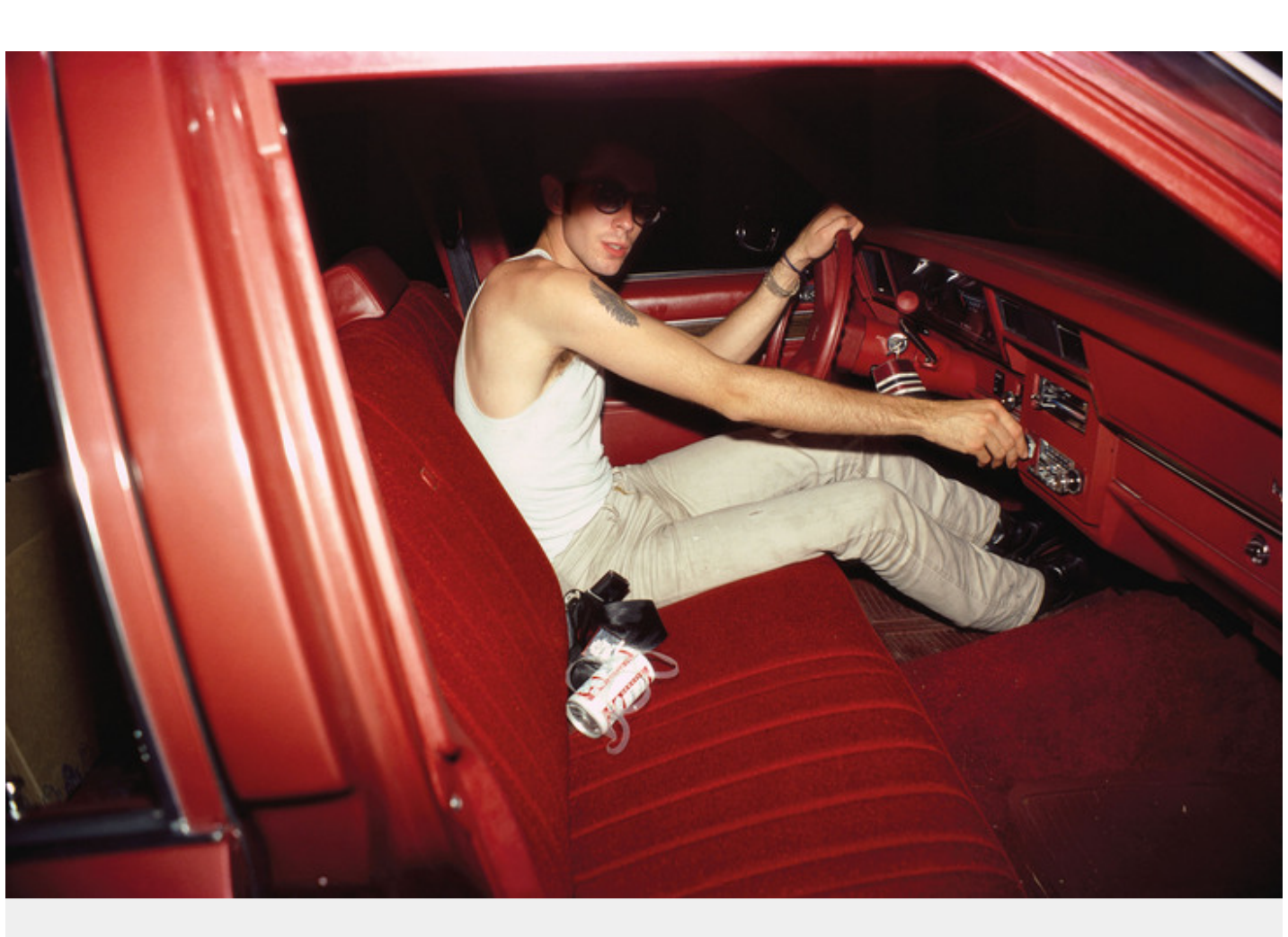


Copyright Sverre Malling.

Pierced and impaled animals, Gothic castles, and a skull surrounded by candles are all part of Sverre Malling's worlds, which draw on English, German, and Scandinavian cultural history. All his drawings are filled with atmosphere, and hover between the innocent and the macabre. Immerse yourself in these twisted fairy tales from the artist's imagination.

Sverre Malling: At The Mistress' Request at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery. **10 January-7 February 2026, free.**

Sex, portraits and photography: Nan Goldin & Richard Avedon at Gagosian



© Nan Goldin. Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Gender, intimacy, and power in downtown New York are all captured in Nan Goldin's photography. To mark 40 years since the publication of Goldin's photobook, The Ballad of Sexual Dependency, all the works are brought together for the first time in the UK. It's personal, tender, and Goldin describes it as "the diary I let people read."

In the larger gallery space, a separate exhibition marks another 40th anniversary: Richard Avedon's In the American West, a series of photographs that capture the heart of working-class America, from a photographer better known for his fashion photography.

Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency at Gagosian Davies Street. **13 January-21 March 2026, free.**
Richard Avedon: Facing West at Gagosian, Grosvenor Hill. **15 January-14 March 2026, free.**

Aloha: Hawai'i at The British Museum

An 'Umeke ki'i (bowl with figure) © The Trustees of the British Museum

Two hundred years ago, a Hawaiian King and Queen visited the UK to seek an alliance with the Crown, and they also visited the British Museum. Now the museum is looking back at the thousand-year history of people inhabiting the archipelago. It features over 150 objects, including an 'ahu 'ula (feathered cloak) sent in 1810 by the first king of unified Hawai'i, Kamehameha I, to King George III. The cloak will be on display for the first time in over 100 years, alongside the Hawaiian king's original letter requesting support and protection from the Crown.

Hawai'i: a kingdom crossing oceans at the British Museum. **15 January-25 May 2026, £14-16.**

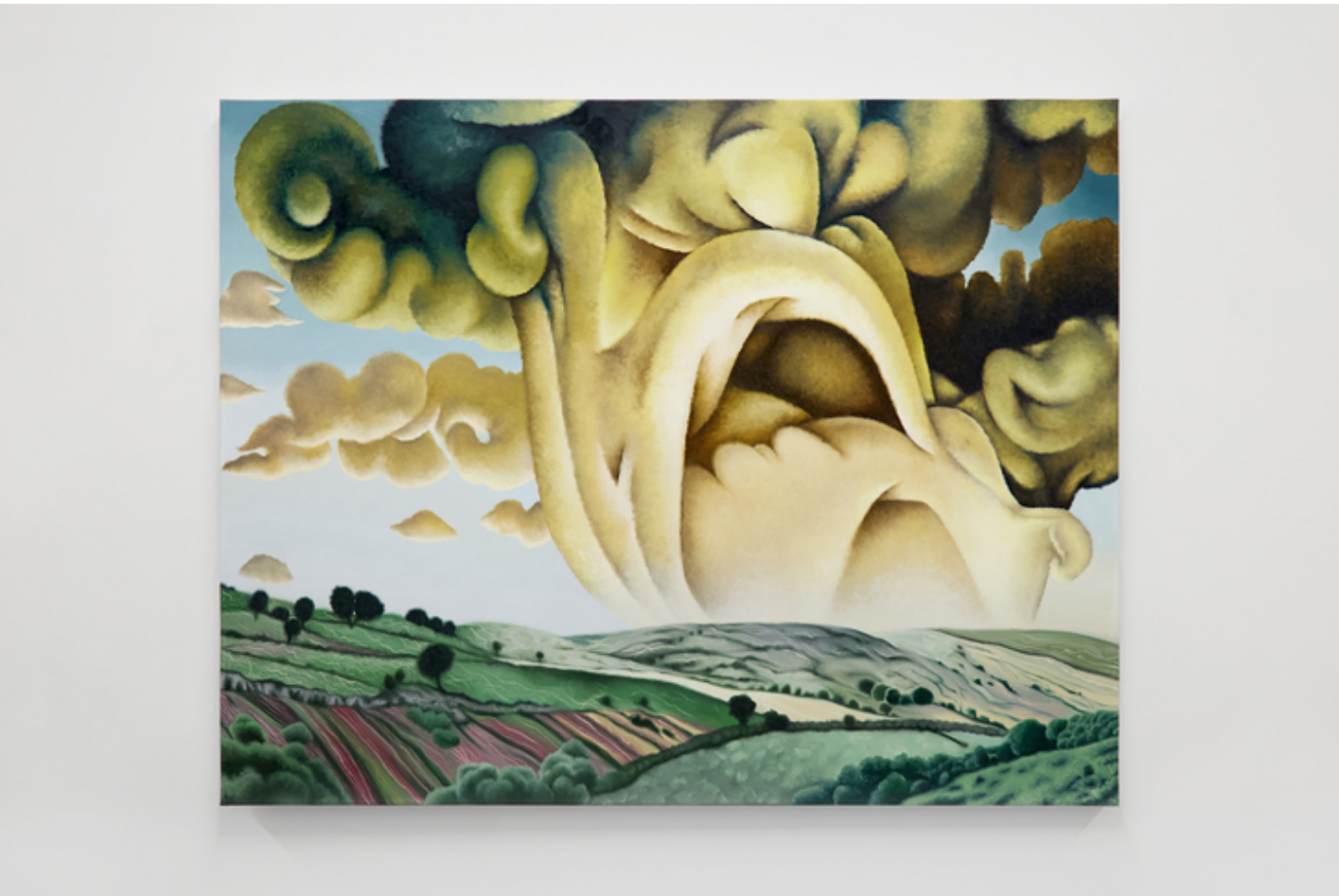
Friends and family: Kindred at Bethlem Museum of the Mind

Holding on to Daddy by Benji Reid. Copyright the artist.

Where would we be without our friends and family? The power of our communities becomes even more critical for those suffering mental health challenges. Each of the artists featured has created work that explores the emotions evoked when groups of people gather or when communities fracture. The exhibition is peppered with scenes of gatherings, both spontaneous and organised, joyful and sorrowful, as well as images of isolation and feelings of abandonment.

Kindred at Bethlem Museum of the Mind. **16 January-27 June 2026, free.**

Weird weather: Jane Hayes Greenwood at Ione & Mann

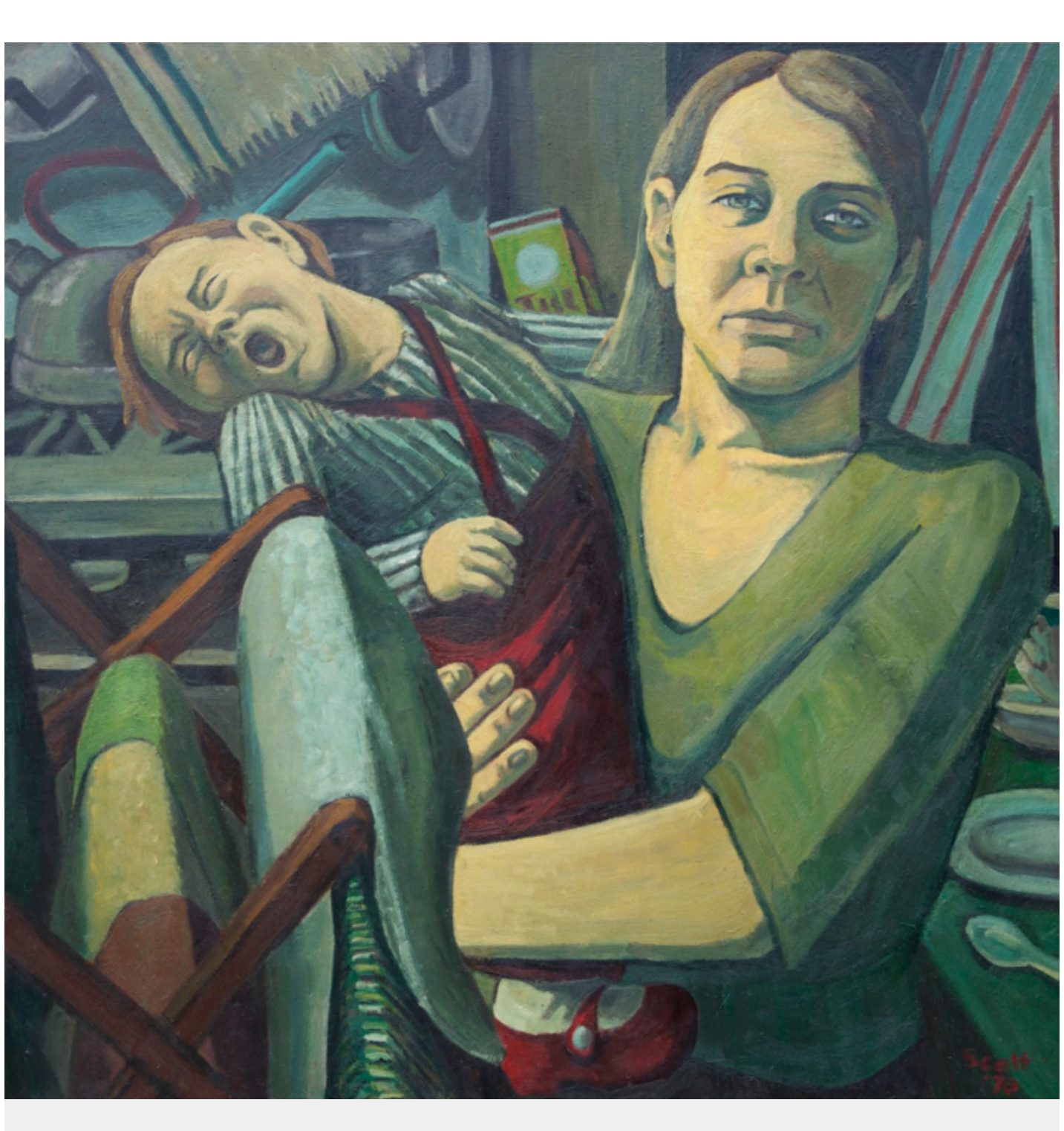


Copyright Jane Hayes Greenwood.

These surreal landscape paintings merge the hills and skies of the artist's West Yorkshire childhood with more personal emotions and memories, including the loss of her mother in 2025. The results are atmospheric skies that blend natural phenomena with more anthropomorphic elements, hovering over green landscapes. Living through a climate crisis, these works are symbolic of both personal loss and the broader damage to the landscape we're all experiencing as global weather systems become more extreme.

Jane Hayes Greenwood: Weird Weather, co-presented with Castor at Ione & Mann. **23 January-7 March 2026, free.**

Shared burdens: The Weight of Being at Two Temple Place

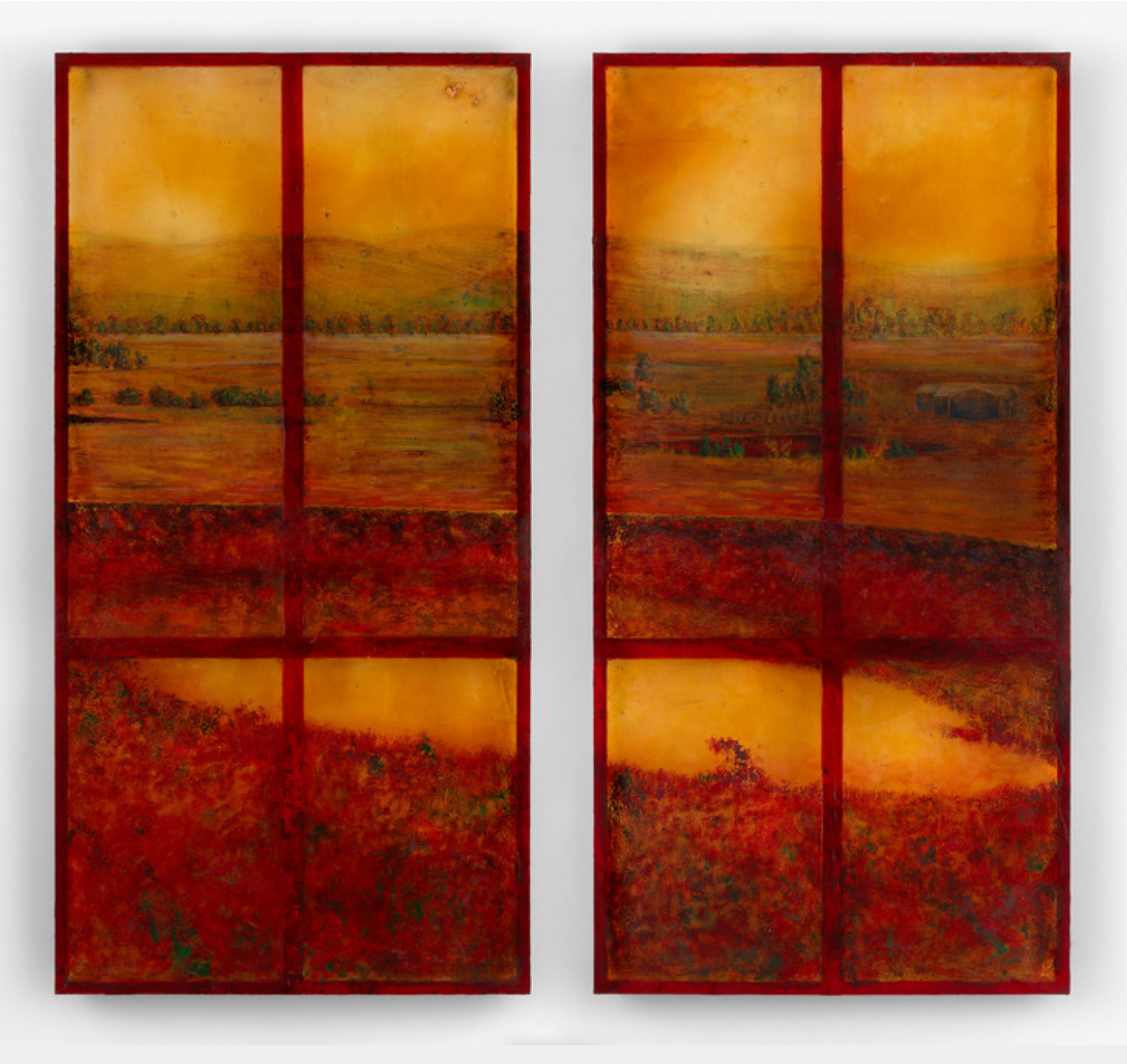


Maureen Scott, Mother and Child at Breaking Point. Courtesy of Bethlem Museum of the Mind

We all face challenges in life. Some are personal to us, and others are more universal as we struggle with finances and heartbreak. This exhibition views mental health as a common thread that connects all humanity, rather than as an othering experience. Drawing on a diverse selection of contemporary and 20th-century British artists, the show explores how mental health can shape artistic expression, showcasing how different artists capture vulnerability, resilience, and the search for solace. It's hosted in one of our favourite venues in London, with a phenomenal interior.

The Weight of Being: Vulnerability, Resilience and Mental Health in British Art at Two Temple Place. **24 January-19 April 2026, free.**

Home and heritage: KV Duong at Pippy Houldsworth

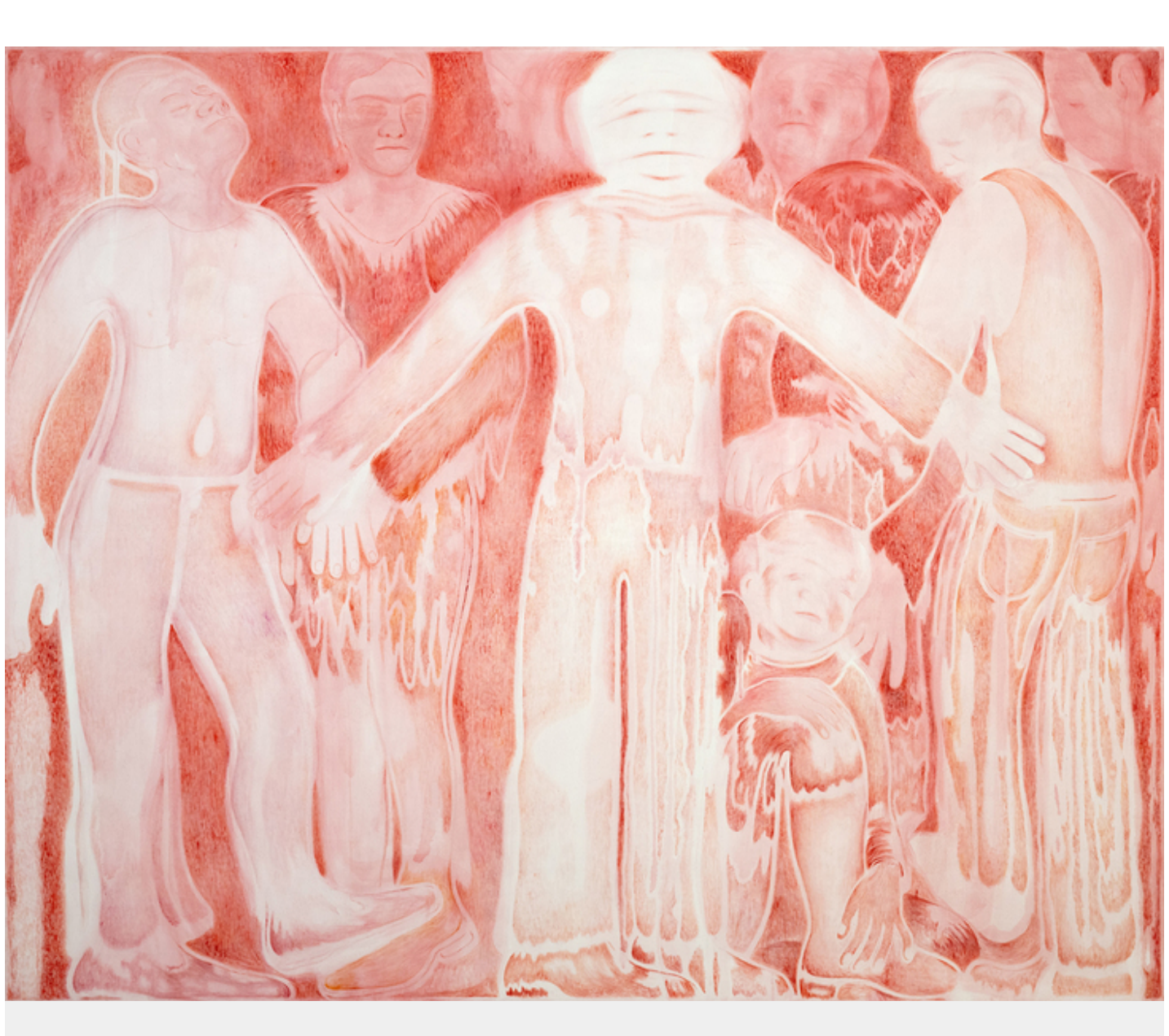


Copyright KV Duong.

What does home look like to us? For artist KV Duong, it's complicated - he's an ethnically Chinese artist born in Vietnam, raised in Canada, and now living and working in the UK. All of these backgrounds come together in his works on latex — a material associated with fetish and the Queer community, but also the rubber plantations in Vietnam under French rule. The works feature family photos and are within found frames painted red, representing both Communism and domestic interiors. It speaks to the broader migration experience of many of us and offers a deeply personal look at his heritage.

KV Duong: Where Wound Becomes Water at Pippy Houldsworth. **30 January-14 March 2026, free.**

Emerging talent: New Contemporaries at South London Gallery

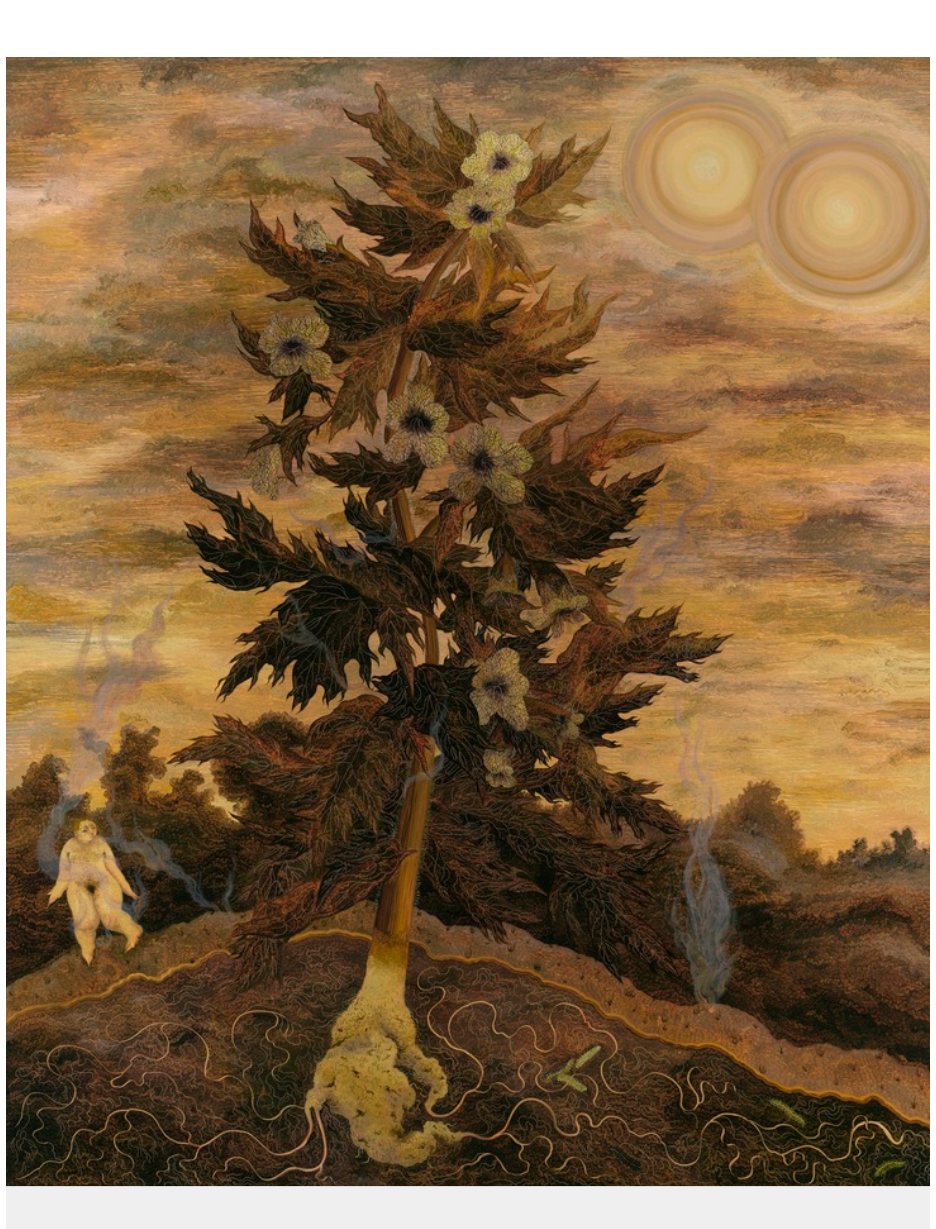


Eliza Wagener is one of the featured artists. Image copyright of the artist.

This annual exhibition features some of the most exciting emerging artists in the UK, including recent graduates, and it's been running for over 75 years. This year's exhibition includes Makiko Harris, who transforms symbols of femininity into powerful works, and Ukrainian artist Varvara Uhlik, whose practice examines generational trauma, cultural memory, and the enduring shadow of Russian imperialism on both individual lives and the wider socio-political fabric of Eastern Europe.

New Contemporaries 2026 at South London Gallery. **30 January-12 April 2026, free.**

Poisonous plants: Georg Wilson at Pilar Corrias

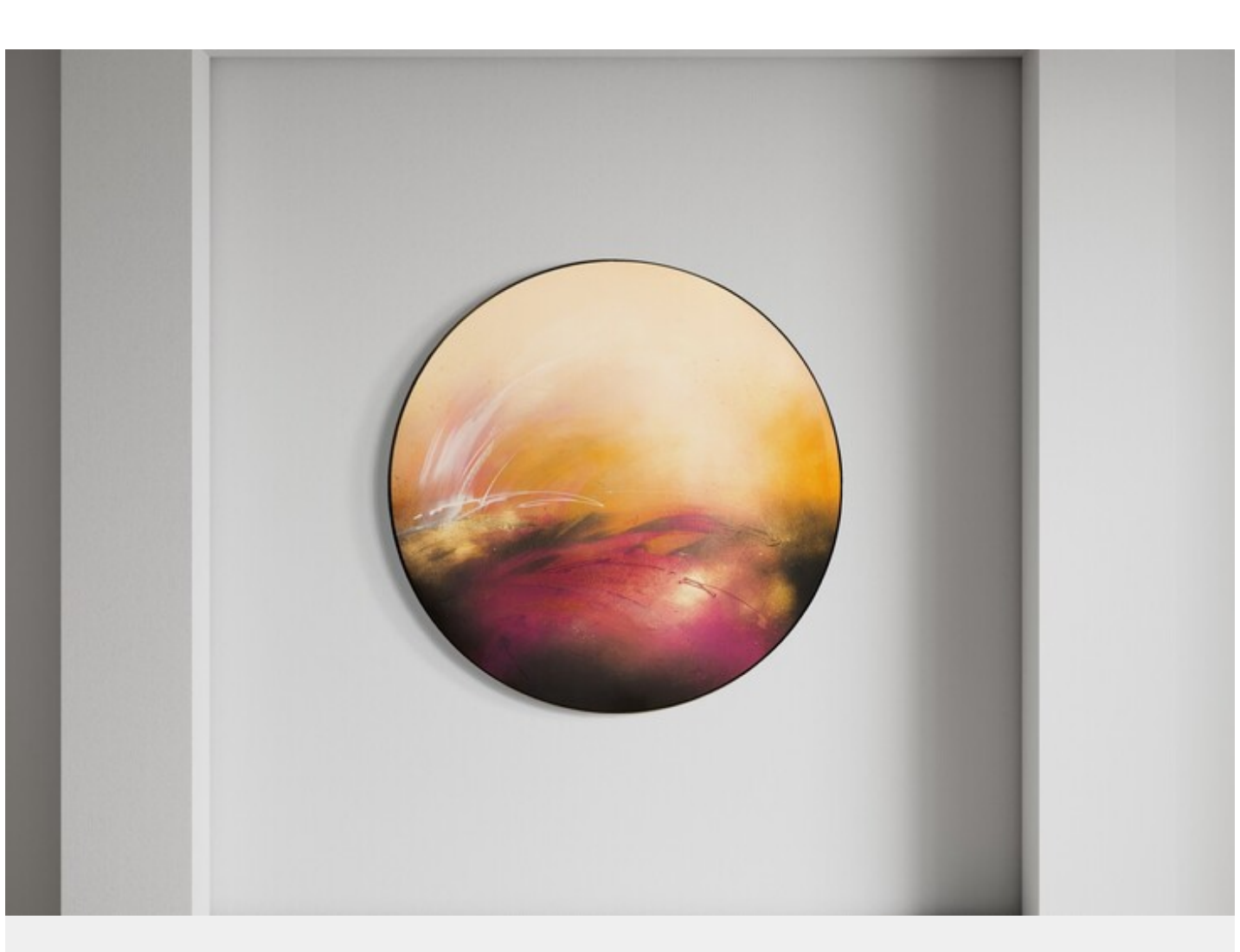


Copyright Georg Wilson

Welcome to the British countryside, but not as you know it. Wild creatures range instead of humans in this imaginary world, where the focus is on poisonous plants — rare, harmful elements that can be found in the normally peaceful pastoral world. Plant life has suffered at the hands of the Industrial Revolution, and here they take centre stage, with creatures lurking in the background. It's a fitting winter exhibition, as these paintings chart the changing of the seasons as the land grows darker and potentially more magical.

Georg Wilson: Against Nature at Pilar Corrias, Savile Row. **30 January-7 March 2026, free.**

Short-run exhibitions and events



Copyright Kate Mayer

If you're looking for some art to chase the Winter blues away, head to Bobcat Gallery in Putney for ArtCan's (IM)Material exhibition (6-24 January 2026, free), filled with artists who use textiles or incorporate textiles into their work. Staying south of the river, OHSH Projects has taken over the Victorian Old Waiting Room at Peckham Rye station to host the exhibition 'Pelt' (8-17 January 2026, free), which examines the tension between the representation of ageing flesh and the pursuit of idealised perfection. In Mayfair, Kate Mayer's abstract paintings capture the transfer of energy from sound to colour, translating frequencies, rhythm, and emotion into visual form at 54 The Gallery (19-24 January 2026, free).

London Art Fair. Image copyright Sam Frost.

If art fairs are what you're after, then the traditional start to the art calendar year, London Art Fair, is back at the Business Design Centre (21-25 January 2026, ticketed) with a great collection of modern and contemporary artworks, including over 120 galleries and over 1,000 artists. In comparison, the opulent setting of Alexandra Palace hosts the returning Fresh Art Fair (30 January-1 February 2026, ticketed), featuring over 50 galleries and catering to budgets ranging from £50 to £20,000.

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