

Inspiration / Art & Crafts

Eye of the Storm: Michael Smith's dramatic paintings of stormy seas during the Franklin expedition

Written by
Katy Cowan

16.01.2019



All artwork courtesy of Nicholas Metivier Gallery. Michael Smith *Danger Waters #1*, 2018 acrylic on canvas 48 x 60 in.

<https://www.creativeboom.com/inspiration/eye-of-the-storm-michael-smiths-dramatic-paintings-of-stormy-seas-during-the-early-expeditions/>

In his latest series, *The Eye of the Storm*, artist Michael Smith presents a series of paintings and works on paper, inspired by HMS *Terror* and its part in the ill-fated Franklin expedition of 1845. Sourcing maps and other artefacts relating to the historical expedition, his visceral seascapes also allude to contemporary events that have been subject to the unpredictability of nature.

"Last winter, I was invited by The Beaverbrook Art Gallery to spend a month working in the new Bruno Bobak studio alongside their collections," explains Michael. "During this time, I was drawn to a maritime painting by George Chambers titled, *The Crew of HMS 'Terror' Saving the Boats and Provisions on the Night of 15th March (1837)*, 1838. I was also given access to the Beaverbrook's archives where I found two related watercolours by William Smythe. Chambers' painting would likely have been influenced by these works."



Michael Smith *Migration*, 2018 acrylic on canvas 76 x 94 in.



Michael Smith *Leaving in a Squall*, 2018 acrylic on canvas 52 x 64 in.

"Although the HMS Terror represented in Chambers' painting recalls one of its early arctic expeditions," he adds, "it was the ship's plight during the Franklin voyage that fired my imagination. As I worked on many studies and improvisations, I felt as though the museum was a laboratory for the imagination rather than a repository for historical works. The narrative of the Franklin expedition became more and more intriguing to me adding to my research about shipwrecks, storms, and other maritime misadventures."

This isn't the first time Michael has painted seascapes; it's been a lifelong theme. "I lived by the sea as an art student in Cornwall. I remember watching a trawler smash to a thousand shards of wood and steel as it was being gently raised and lowered onto rocks by a gradual swell.

"Years later, I saw a photograph in a small museum in North Sydney, Nova Scotia of a rogue wave almost capsizing a vessel full of soldiers on their way to fight in World War II. The

simultaneous majesty and terror of the elements leads to my continued fascination with the ocean."

Michael Smith was born in Derby, England in 1951. He immigrated to Montreal, Canada in his late twenties where he completed his MFA at Concordia University and has lived there ever since. You can see The Eye of the Storm at Nicholas Metivier Gallery in Toronto from 7 February until 2 March.



Michael Smith Break of Weather, 2018 acrylic on canvas 76 x 94 in.



Michael Smith *Rogue*, 2018 acrylic on canvas 76 x 94 in.



Michael Smith *Abeyance*, 2018 acrylic on canvas 30 x 72 in.