

# Frank To Exhibition at The Leith Gallery

[✘ Frank To, the young Glasgow-based artist with a growing international reputation as a leading contemporary figurative painter, launches 'The Human Condition', his first major art show for two years, on April Fools Day, Friday 1 April, at The Leith Gallery.](#)

In a series of paintings depicting the Mediaeval Plague Doctors, which have fascinated the artist for the last three years, To said that 'The Human Condition' is inspired by both personal and national, historic and modern preoccupations and themes which have a direct bearing on the location of the exhibition as well as its content and form.

Frank To said: "I've always been fascinated with the 1600s and 1700s, when science was starting to emerge but alchemy was still prevalent – and the plague doctors were alchemists as well as physicians.

"I first came across an image of the plague doctors three years ago and this fascinated me and prompted me to research the subject extensively. Although detailed information was hard to come by, I did uncover clear historical evidence of the existence of two plague doctors in Edinburgh, which suffered from the plague in the 1600s.

"One of the worst hit areas in the capital was Mary King's Close, on the Royal Mile, in the oldest part of the city, while it is thought that the plague virus, which was spread throughout the city by fleas carried by rats, originated from ships at Leith Docks. It is therefore entirely fitting that this exhibition is shown at The Leith Gallery."

In addition to his fascination with the imagery and historical context of the subject, To is equally intrigued by the

relevance of plague doctors to the modern world.

“Not only were plague doctors physicians, they were also public servants, and I find it fascinating that hundreds of years ago town and city councils paid fortunes to plague doctors to aid sufferers, whilst today, in stark contrast, despite Scotland having some of the world’s leading specialist units for the treatment of infectious diseases, we are seeing the NHS subjected to radical cost-cutting reforms.”

The dark subject matter of the exhibition also has direct personal relevance to To. In addition to having himself recovered only recently from suffering a severe skin infection, having contracted a virus in the USA two years ago, some of his latest work relates to his ethnic origin as Chinese; the first plague, The Black Death, having originated in the Far East before spreading along the silk road to Europe.

This personal relevance of the subject matter has led the artist to develop a new performance art element to his oeuvre, which will see him wear a plague doctor costume commissioned specially to his own specifications for the exhibition.

“The way I work is to get really heavily involved in the subject matter,” he said. “For me to understand the subject matter fully, I need to explore it and engage with it on a personal level.

“How do I really know what plague doctors went through unless I go through the same experience? That’s why, inspired partly by the method school of acting, as part of the exhibition I’ll be wearing their costume and retracing the steps they took through the capital, from Mary King’s Close to Leith.”

Frank To’s ‘The Human Condition’ comprises a series of figurative paintings, predominantly oil on canvas with two self-portraits using mixed media on paper.

Jan Morrison, owner of The Leith Gallery said, “This new

exhibition shows that Frank is continuing to go from strength to strength with his work. He is constantly pushing the boundaries in his paintings with new and exciting ideas. That's what makes Frank's work so vigorous and intriguing."

Showing at The Leith Gallery from 1-30 April, 'The Human Condition' features 22 paintings ranging in size from 14cm x 14cm up to 80cm x 110cm and in price from £550 up to £5000.