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2 BROADWAY MARKET  
LONDON E8 4TS



# A SACK OF DIRT

JAMES LANG  
DIEN BERZIGA

CURATED BY  
CATHERINE LI

Dirt, often referred to something unclean, unsanitary, something in opposition to the sacred. A sack, commonly used to hold items of value, things we wish to keep safe or hold sacred. It is not usual to contain dirt within a sack; we don't gather it for archiving purposes, we throw it away instead.

Yet, keeping dirt within a sack is, in fact, our daily reality—at least it is the daily reality for the artists of this exhibition. In their painting realism, the canvas is a container, a sack, a land open for fertility and newborns. The dirt is both the surface and the subject matter, a catalyst of narrative and the narrative itself.

James Lang  
*Elephant & Castle (close-up)*  
2023  
Acrylic and mixed media on canvas  
180 x 160cm  
(not in the show)



In **Jame Lang's** paintings, luminous appearances and painterly forms merge with the thick presence. The cave-like surface creates a flashback to ancient time, while consistently constructing a fictional place, in which we could see what is happening, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else. Human and non-human beings, symbols and words are assemblages that are also imbricated into larger assemblage, a strong narrative—a carrier bag, as per Ursula K. Le Guin's theory—carrying the ways of living, the wild diversity of themes, including allegories, gender, dreams and beliefs.

Dien Berziga  
*Via aurelia and its men*  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
11" x 15" / 28 x 40 cm  
(not in the show)



**Dien Berziga's** paintings expose how narratives are present within the matter of dirt that surrounds us, lies beneath us and constantly moves with us. Dien's approach to the narrative is nonlinear, concerned with revisiting and simultaneity: while the painting's surface is chronologically layered through the painter's laborious toil, its narrative unfolds spontaneously. There is never an answer regarding whether the subject matter comes before the material matter or vice versa. The narrative sedimentates, yet the process is inherently destructive and regressive. For the painter, the narrative expands outward, while the appearance goes inwards. At that moment, the painting is already dark, obscure and looks decayed - like a ragged sack finally filled up with dirt that he has been satisfied with.

A SACK OF DIRT suggests a way of thinking about painting through 'a sack of dirt'. A sack of dirt contains soil, dust, and grime, it can be both fertile and toxic, life-sustaining and life-threatening—a fact same to painting. It is never a tomb, a monument, or a dead thing. It is a tangible carrier of growth, circulation, and decay. It presents a particular reality—an inescapable and unsettling materiality. To be reminded that we are essentially a hybrid of organic and inorganic matter, much like a painting—a container of pigments, a carrier of stories, existing within a liminal space, akin to a sack of dirt.