

GLADSTONE

Mark Westall, "Tate Britain to present the first UK survey exhibition of Ed Atkins," *FAD Magazine*, January 27, 2025

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Ed Atkins, *Good Baby*, 2017 © Ed Atkins. Courtesy of the Artist, Cabinet London, dépendance, Brussels, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, and Gladstone Gallery.

This spring, Tate Britain will present the first UK survey exhibition of Ed Atkins (b. Oxford, 1982).

One of the most influential British artists working today, Atkins is best known for his computer-generated videos and animations. Repurposing contemporary technologies in unexpected ways, his work traces the dwindling gap between the digital world and human feeling. He borrows techniques from cinema, video games, literature, music and theatre to examine the relationship between reality, realism and fiction.

This exhibition features moving image works from the last 15 years alongside writing, paintings, embroideries and drawings. In these works, the artist uses his own experiences, feelings and body as models to mediate between technology and themes of intimacy, love and loss. Together, they pit a weightless digital life against the physical world of heft, craft and touch.

Repetition and difference will act as a structural device throughout the show. Atkins will split artworks across rooms, repeat them or alter their format. He wants to induce a sense of the familiar made strange, of digression, mistake, confusion, incoherence and interruption. For him, this exhibition represents a reimagining of the messy reality of life: the more we experience, the more complex and less contained it becomes.



Ed Atkins, *Death Mask II: The Scent*, 2010. Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Brian and Nancy Pattenden Bequest 2012 © Ed Atkins. Courtesy of the Artist, Cabinet London, dépendance, Brussels, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, and Gladstone Gallery.



Ed Atkins, *Cur*, 2010 © Ed Atkins. Courtesy of the Artist, Cabinet London, dépendance, Brussels, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, and Gladstone Gallery.

The exhibition will begin with two early video works: *Death Mask II* and *Cur*, both from 2010. Described by Atkins as “montages of intoxication, rejection and abandonment”, these early videos announce the artist's distinctive visual and auditory syntax, and a mood and address that can be found throughout all of his videos. These early works also introduce Atkins' foregrounding of medium and the technologies used in their making. Whether through conspicuous lens flares or autofocus racking or seemingly involuntary blurs of audio, the artist wants us to remember that we are looking at something profoundly artificial, built to seduce and repulse.



Ed Atkins, *The Worm*, 2021 © Ed Atkins. Courtesy of the Artist, Cabinet London, dépendance, Brussels, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, and Gladstone Gallery



Ed Atkins *Pianowork 2* 2023 © Ed Atkins. Courtesy of the Artist, Cabinet London, dépendance, Brussels, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, and Gladstone Gallery.

Later works see Atkins shift into almost exclusively using computer-generated animation. *Refuse.exe*, from 2019, uses a video game engine to tip a stream of trash onto a stage, and *Hisser*, from 2015, shows a male figure, animated by Atkins' performance, who apologises, masturbates, and falls into a sinkhole. Many of the videos are also performances of the artist, as recorded using performance capture technologies. *The Worm* from 2021, for example, features an animated TV staging of a phone call between Atkins and his mother, while *Pianowork 2* from 2024 has an extremely accurate digital double of the artist performing a minimalist piano piece.

Loss – profoundly felt and forensically scrutinised – pervades the exhibition. Atkins' own experiences and fantasies of loss define his work; the death of his father, and his daughter's roleplaying of fantastical sickness, form the basis of a new feature-length film made in collaboration with the poet Steven Zultanski, which will premiere in the exhibition.

Self-portraiture is another consistent thread in Atkins' work; it is always a version of Atkins stalking his works, and more often than not, his figures – surrogates – are entirely alone. The exhibition will include realistic pencil drawings of the artist's face and limbs as well as convincing paintings of mattresses and pillows bearing traces of absent bodies. Atkins' neurotic examination of his own body speaks to the ever-expanding anxiety of contemporary self-identity, but also to an ancient sense of a person striving to understand something of who they are, and who they appear to be. Whether in analogue or digital form, Atkins' works are an entanglement of reality, artifice and the psychopathology of everyday life.

At the heart of the exhibition will be a mass of drawings on Post-It notes which the artist makes for his children. Atkins describes them as “miniature images of seemingly infinite invention” and “tiny, laboured, inscrutable attempts to communicate feeling.” For him, these Post-It note drawings are something like a legend at the bottom of the map, teaching us a way of looking and of feeling. The drawings are also joyful, playful, absurd, confessional, and full of love.



Ed Atkins, *Untitled*, 2018. © Ed Atkins Courtesy of the Artist, Cabinet London, dépendance, Brussels, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin, and Gladstone Gallery.

Curated by Polly Staple, Former Director of Collection, British Art and Nathan Ladd, Curator, Contemporary British Art, with Hannah Marsh, Assistant Curator, Contemporary British Art.

Ed Atkins, 2nd April – 25th August 2025 Tate Britain

Ed Atkins is supported by The Ed Atkins Exhibition Supporters Circle, Tate International Council and Tate Patrons. Ed Atkins' new film (with Steven Zultanski) was commissioned and produced by Hartwig Art Foundation.

About the artist



The artist performing Jürg Frey's Klavierstück 2, rigged with performance capture equipment and surrounded by microphones at the MIMIC HQ, Berlin 2023. Courtesy of the Artist.

Ed Atkins was born in 1982 in Oxford and now lives and works in Copenhagen. His work has been recognised internationally with solo exhibitions at institutions including The New Museum, New York; K21, Dusseldorf; SMK, Copenhagen; Stedelijk, Amsterdam, and the Serpentine Gallery, London. Atkins' work is held in major collections including Tate, Centre Pompidou, Stedelijk Museum and MoMA, New York, among many others. Atkins has been the recipient of numerous awards including Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award and The Jerwood / Film and Video Umbrella Award. His writing has also been published extensively. This year his first non-fiction book *Flower* will be published by Fitzcarraldo Editions in April, and his libretto for a new opera by Rebecca Saunders will premiere at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in June.