

**PUBLICATION DATE APRIL 2016**

## **TOWARDS THE LIGHT: The Paintings of Ørnulf Opdahl**

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*Darkness is never black, it always has a colour, a temperature. Darkness appears monotonous only at first glance ... in order to paint the light, I have to make room for darkness. Ørnulf Opdahl*

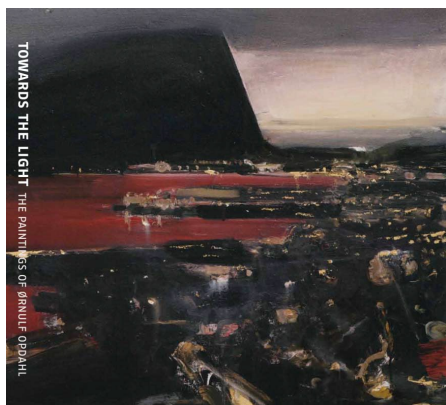
**Towards the Light** is the first comprehensive survey of Norwegian artist Ørnulf Opdahl's epic paintings of mystical peaks, desolate glaciers and brooding skies. This major new publication spanning 25 years of work by this extraordinary artist coincides with exhibitions of his paintings in London and Newcastle upon Tyne.

Ørnulf Opdahl, one of Scandinavia's most distinguished artists, comes from the west coast of Norway, a landscape marked by deep contrasts and evanescent light. He lives and works on the island of Godøy on the west coast of Norway near Ålesund where he was born. Like Wordsworth who believed that growing up in the Lake District made him a favoured being, Opdahl, after years of living in Oslo returned to his home landscape for similar reasons.

The landscape of the Sunmøre Mountains and nearby fjords continues to move him profoundly. He knows the routes to the glaciers, the minor tracks around the fjords, the different kinds of snow and the way in which it reflects light. Indeed when Robert Rosenblum, in discussing Edvard Munch, wrote of his sensitivity to the extremes of nature's forces, 'first the extinction of light in the long, dark and cold winter, and then the dramatic resurrection of the sun which reigns during the summer months, deep into the night', he could equally have been describing Opdahl.

For all that his relationship with his native landscape is experiential, his pictorial approach to it is meditative and philosophical; his instinct is not to describe or depict it, but to create moods which suggest its latent powers. With colours like dying embers of a fire – glowing umber, the greys of ashes and charcoal blacks, Opdahl's paintings often have a sense of imminence. However, his potentially menacing landscapes can also resemble paradise on earth, of winter nights emanating light, of skies irradiated by stars; a cosmic reminder of infinity and an intimation of mortality.

**Toward the Light: The Paintings of Ørnulf Opdahl** includes 164 colour images creating a visual chronology of the artist's paintings spanning the years from 1990 to the present. William Varley's accompanying essay describes the artist's philosophical and artistic influences, which include romantic predecessors as diverse as Wordsworth, Peder Balke and Rothko. He maintains that Opdahl's predilection for seeing light as a spiritual element rather than merely a natural phenomenon brings us closer to understanding him as a remarkable heir to nordic romanticism.



### **TOWARDS THE LIGHT: The Paintings of Ørnulf Opdahl**

Paperback 280 x 280mm

192 pages

164 colour illustrations

Essay by William Varley

ISBN 978-0-9935228-0-2

PRICE £30.00

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Fjord Landscape 2009, Oil on canvas 70 x 240cm © Ørnulf Opdahl

## ØRNULF OPDAHL

The Norwegian, Ørnulf Opdahl is one of the most important painters working in Scandinavia today. Strongly influenced by the sublime sense of place so evident in the magnificent coastal landscape of his native West Norway, Opdahl's powerfully scaled, lyrically charged work draws upon stimulating currents from both his own Norwegian landscape tradition and the philosophical and spiritual concerns of post-1945 abstract art.

Born in 1944, Opdahl studied at the Norwegian National Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo from 1962 to 1965 where he later became a professor from 1985 until 1992. He has exhibited internationally and his work is represented in many public and private collections including the Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo; the Bibliothèque National de Paris; the Royal Palace; the Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo and the British Museum, London.

**WILLIAM VARLEY** succeeded Victor Pasmore, Richard Hamilton and Ian Stephenson as Director of Foundation Studies at Newcastle University Fine Art Department, from 1970 – 2000. Throughout his teaching career, he had a parallel role as an art critic and broadcaster, principally as regional reviewer for 'The Guardian'. He has written extensively on British and Scandinavian art and is a regular contributor to the magazine 'State' with a series of polemical articles on art and culture.



## EXHIBITIONS

**15 April – 9 May 2016**

Ørnulf Opdahl: New Paintings  
Purdy Hicks Gallery,  
Bankside  
London SE1 9GZ  
[www.purdyhicks.com](http://www.purdyhicks.com)

**13 May – 4 June 2016**

Gallagher & Turner / Jesmond Dene House  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
[www.gallagherandturner.co.uk](http://www.gallagherandturner.co.uk)

For more information please contact Mara-Helen Wood at  
[info@mhwpublications.co.uk](mailto:info@mhwpublications.co.uk)  
[www.mhwpublications.co.uk](http://www.mhwpublications.co.uk) T 0191 261 4465

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