

DISC UNKNOWN

2 – 30 August 2026

Disc Unknown is a solo exhibition of mixed-media paintings by Joe O'Rourke.

O'Rourke's paintings are made from the materials and images that surround us every day. Billboard adverts, magazine pages, DVD cases, a 1970s factory worker's timesheet and a child's science homework all become part of his work. These found images, texts and objects connect different times and places. They also bring together opposites: the handmade and the mass-produced, the intimate and the everyday, the unique and the generic. For O'Rourke, they are starting points for making, carrying different meanings, from traces of the recent past to signs of hidden systems, including corporate influence, uncertain promises and anxieties about the future.

O'Rourke says he is 'interested in the emotional responsiveness of painting and its expanded possibilities, how it can hold an internal psychological space while also staging an encounter with the external world. I aim to create works that remain open, emotionally charged, and materially attentive, spaces where viewers encounter both the intimacy of making and the instability of the world that shapes it.' (2026)

Living in Manchester, O'Rourke is surrounded by the visual language of new developments and consumer culture. He is interested in how these polished images can shape our experience of the city, sometimes drawing attention away from wider issues such as underfunded public services, the loss of shared public spaces, and the climate crisis. Reflecting on these experiences, his paintings deliberately reveal their own construction; stretcher bars are exposed, fixings remain visible, and interior spaces are opened up. Questioning what lies beneath the surface of the manufactured image of contemporary life, his work often appears unstable and temporary.

O'Rourke's process is deliberately fragmentary. At times, he treats text like imagery, cutting it up or partially obscuring it, interrupting and exposing the sterile, and often ludicrous, language of advertising and mixing it with the more human gestures of painting. Some works take their titles from songs, suggesting more personal and emotional connections, including *I want you here* (2025) and *Somethin' ain't right* (2025), both taken from songs by Sharon Van Etten.

For this exhibition, O'Rourke has created two site-specific works, adapting *A Second Body* (2026) for the windows of Castlefield Gallery and developing *help* (2026) across the gallery's double-height wall. Together, these works reinforce a central aspect of his practice: that the meaning of his works is never fixed, but remains in constant flux, open to reinterpretation each time and wherever they are encountered.

This exhibition is part of a collaboration between Castlefield Gallery and Pipeline, London, who came together through a shared commitment to supporting and amplifying emerging artists. O'Rourke's proposal was selected from an open call through the Castlefield Gallery Associates programme.

'Joe thinks about painting as an environment rather than a single image. This collaboration with Castlefield Gallery creates a compelling framework for that idea to unfold across two distinct spaces and audiences. For Pipeline, the project reflects an important commitment to working beyond London and building meaningful exchanges between artists, institutions and audiences across the UK'

Tatiana Cheneviere, Founder of Pipeline

O'Rourke exhibited at Pipeline Contemporary from 4 June to 18 July 2026.

ARTIST AND CURATOR TOUR

Join Joe O'Rourke and Castlefield Gallery's Head of Programmes Matthew Pendergast for a tour of the exhibition on Thursday 27 August, 12 - 1:30pm.

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