

Josh Smith
Keyhole
10 March
— 16 April 2022

Press Release

Keyhole [noun]: a hole in a lock into which the key is inserted.

In an exhibition spanning both gallery spaces, Josh Smith presents a new series of abstract paintings together with an ensemble of recent figurative monotypes. In this diverse installation, the artist explores the impact of colour, gesture and form across a range of motifs, some of which are familiar while others represent a new thematic departure.

The paintings created for *Keyhole* revisit a recurrent thread in Josh Smith's work – the language of abstraction – but amplified in terms of scale and energy. Smith has long been fascinated by the non-prescriptive nature of this painting style: that such works can mean everything and nothing; that any attempt at interpretation is purely subjective. With no predefined rules for creating such images, the path lies open for boundless experimentation. And it is within this exploratory field that Smith creates a space for both himself (abstraction, perhaps more than any other genre, is thought to express an artist's emotions) and the viewer. In a certain sense, his abstract paintings are akin to poems or signals: the transmission of a creative energy that seeks to ignite a spark in the beholder, be that one of exhilaration, empathy, joy or recognition. Effortlessly navigating between abstraction's openness of potential and the continuity of the tradition, his new paintings openly celebrate the joy of making, creating and, above all else, looking at art.

The works on paper depict a familiar range of subjects from Smith's practice, all of which function as catalysts for his rigorous and serialised investigations into colour, aesthetics and the mechanics of printmaking. Motifs include fish, devils, turtles and palm trees – all images that are open-ended and recognisable but free of rules as to how they should (or shouldn't) be depicted. In *Keyhole*, Smith brings different motifs into a mutual dialogue, leading us to consider the relationships between repetition, representation and association. Making their debut are the double skeletons that resemble medieval tomb effigies or archaeological illustrations: cool, sober and yet, in a whimsical way, deeply expressive. The recent cityscapes, created during the lockdown, capture the desolate streets of New York – on which they are loosely based – devoid of all extraneous details. In these works, Smith focuses on the structure of the architecture and networks of roads, *sans* people, streetlamps, manhole covers, bins, street signs or mailboxes. The works on paper are unique monotypes, created by applying the ink to a smooth plate, pressing the paper onto the image and pulling it away. The use of Plike paper – which has a plastic-like texture (hence its name) – is not only innovative but also visually intriguing: the inks do not seep into the paper but sit on the surface, bright and luminous.

In bringing these large-format paintings and prints together in *Keyhole*, Smith grants the viewer an unparalleled insight into the varied nature of his practice and, on a more personal level, the wellspring of ideas that fuels his art. The title

is telling in this respect, which could just as easily allude to the images as being the 'keys' to a lock (the artist's mind?) as to the aperture through which one glimpses another world.

Josh Smith (b. 1976, Okinawa) lives and works in New York. Solo exhibitions include *Josh Smith*, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany (2016), *Josh Smith*, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Italy (2015), *The American Dream*, Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut (2011) and *Hidden Darts*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, Austria (2008).

For further inquiries please contact the gallery at info@xavierhufkens.com or at +32(0)2 639 67 30. For press enquiries contact anazoe@xavierhufkens.com

#joshsmith
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Twitter: @XavierHufkens
Instagram: @xavierhufkens
Facebook: Xavier Hufkens