

PRESS RELEASE

**MICHAEL BAUER
SLOW FUTURE–H.S.O.P.–OPUS**

22 FEBRUARY – 28 MARCH

PRIVATE VIEW THURSDAY 21 FEBRUARY, 6-8PM

'Bauer's paintings are fragmented, sexual, feverish and funny; worlds within worlds that won't be pinned down. They make me think of filthy cities, and filthier minds; of lavish interiors, abandoned excavations, half-remembered rituals, snatches of music and inexplicable joy.'

Jennifer Higgie, 2008

Alison Jacques Gallery is delighted to present Michael Bauer's inaugural exhibition at the gallery, a new series of oil paintings entitled *Slow Future-H.S.O.P.-Opus*. He employs an extraordinary range of mark-making in them – from heavy impasto to fine-brush doodles – layering diverse narrative clues as if engaged in some ardent form of reverse archaeology. In the middle of large canvases, Bauer builds rich amalgams of fascinating personal detritus, suspending tangled recollections of historical trivia, friends' anecdotes, forgotten bands, maligned painters' mistakes, and so on. All his paintings are fundamentally portraits, but they are portraits of memories.

Bauer loves titles – the more deliberately obscure and diverse the better – and this series is no exception. The 'slow' of *Slow Future* refers to his pace in working, building layer upon layer, organically but never systematically, and because one of the things Bauer has always valued about painting is that it's slower than other media. *H.S.O.P.* is an acronym for the Hudson River School of painting – a 19th century fraternity of American landscape painters who hold no significance for Bauer other than the fact that they've become unfashionable and he likes the idea of "colonizing their memory". He fundamentally disagrees with the notion that painting itself has become obsolete and, by annexing a school devoted to it, seeks to re-emphasize that painting remains not only central to his future, but to *the* future. *Opus* is a typically self-deprecating Bauer addendum, a tongue-in-cheek nod to the fact that he doesn't see this or any other of his series as fitting into an ordered theory or composition.

Bauer usually adds some kind of coding system to his paintings' surfaces, alluding to a faux structure at each of their premises. These have recently taken the form of colour-coded punctuation, but in most of the paintings here the only graphic notation he uses are deliberate red herrings: Bauer has painted small flags in their corners, chosen not because of any personal geographic or historical relevance, but because they are from lesser-known nations that he didn't recognise and are often confused with more prominent countries.

What's particularly appealing to Bauer is that any flag, known or unknown, carries so much invented history. So, in addition to these being framing devices or heraldic elements for each painting, he wants them to function as "traps of meaning" in the context of all the other clues in the works.

Investigating failings – both Bauer's own and those of other painters – is another central element of this exhibition. As an adolescent, he copied the more expressive elements of "an awful Pointillist painter [his] dad collected" and returns to that here, relishing overused and flawed techniques from this and other artists, and, as he says, "focussing on their stupidities". Bauer has also brought more figurative elements into these new works, notably hands and feet, because he was never any good at rendering them as a young artist. Beyond revisiting failures, he uses his own unconscious acts in these works, often deliberately drawing with a brush "while [his] mind is somewhere else". He then invests time responding to these 'mistakes' in very particular, attentive ways. So, whilst Bauer isn't the slightest bit interested in rectifying them, the process of embracing and creating a kind of recycled beauty from the inappropriate and the rejected is absolutely central to his endeavours. Attempting to create resolved works would be disingenuous to Bauer's practice and to what he believes about painting, and one of the enduring fascinations in these works lies precisely in their remaining unfathomable. As Higgie puts it, 'A painting is not, and never has been, an explanation...it will always choose to hide as much as it reveals'.

Michael Bauer (b. 1973, Erkelenz, Germany) studied at the Hochschule fur Bildende Kunst in Braunschweig, and now lives and works in New York. Notable solo exhibitions include *K-Hole (Frogs)*, Villa Merkel, Esslingen am Neckar (2011); *Marquis Dance Hall*, Istanbul (2010); *Anthem*, Kunsthaus Baselland, Basel (2009); and *Kunstverein Bonn*, Bonn (2007). Bauer is the subject of a substantial JRP Ringier monograph published in 2008, entitled *Borwasser*, with a lead essay by Jennifer Higgie and an interview with Stefanie Popp.

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