

PRESS RELEASE

David Deutsch
Hurly-Burly

January 11 – February 8, 2023

All-day opening in both venues

On Wednesday, January 11, 11 am – 6 pm

39 and 55 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012

Eva Presenhuber is delighted to present *Hurly-Burly*, the gallery's first solo exhibition by the New York-based artist David Deutsch, presented jointly with *Venus Over Manhattan*. The collaborative show features 40 works across the two spaces, located at 39 Great Jones Street and 55 Great Jones Street respectively.

David Deutsch makes abstract paintings. Or maybe he makes figurative paintings. Which is right? Neither? Both? There are still serious people out there who see abstraction and the image as irreconcilable. They could even be right—though I doubt it—but even if so, one of the remarkable things about art is its capacity to harbor irreconcilable propensities within a single object. That's because, despite all appearances, art approaches truth; and we should remember the observation once made by the physicist Niels Bohr, that while the opposite of a trivial truth is false, the opposite of a profound truth is another truth. With that in mind, we hold that abstraction and images are two authentic paths to artistic truth.

Recently, when Deutsch and I were talking in his studio, he remarked, "I leave it"—with the word it referring, I believe, the composition as a whole, "but there's always some kind of content with subject matter," and this content is embodied in the imagery woven into the painting's web of fluid marks. Given the small size of many of the figures—as well as cars and houses—I couldn't help but think of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings such as those of Claude Lorrain, in which a few figures nestled into the composition served to elevate the secondary (and fundamentally abstract) genre of landscape to the dignity of history painting. But I don't want this comparison to imply that Deutsch's figures are afterthoughts, mere accessories; he intends them quite differently. "My figures are never incidental," he told Jarrett Earnest. "I guess they are concentrating on what they are doing." But what exactly, in these recent paintings of his, is it that they are doing?

I think these people are fundamentally looking. And observing. And exposing themselves to the tumults of the world that surrounds them. That does take concentration. As observers, they can be understood to be reflections of the viewer, whose incorporation into the scopic structure of the work is thereby emblemized. You can't construct a story out of the representational elements in Deutsch's paintings, nor out of the relation between those elements and the nonrepresentational ones. The paintings' content is not narrative. But it is human, and it has to do with existence in a world that does not necessarily seem intended for one's habitation. Is this even a place? Or how can it be made into a place? It can feel messy, disorienting, but one senses an underlying will to order—I hesitate to cite Wallace Stevens' subtly oxymoronic "rage to order," but there can be a sense of fury in Deutsch's strenuous marks.

Those marks also raise the question about how an image is embodied in paint. Most of Deutsch's recent paintings have been made using an unusual process whereby acrylic paint is applied first onto a plastic sheet, then transferred to the canvas. Painting onto the plastic is a time-based process like most other ways of painting—a temporal sequence of marks that becomes a spatial one, and a spatial arrangement that suggests a dynamic perceptual succession. But then in the second stage of Deutsch's process, the paint is relocated to the canvas all at once—well, really, in two goes, but each time all at once. It's logical to compare this to a monotype but for me, it resonates even more with photography. One feels the "momentness" of the painting's coming into being, which somehow subsumes the preceding temporal sequence. If you compare one of Deutsch's works painted directly with oil on canvas to one of the transfer paintings in acrylic, even with similar imagery, you'll see the oil painting as slower in tempo, and more spatial—the acrylic transfer painting, no

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matter how complex it may be, comes across as faster, more immediate, and more about the plane than about depth. The transfer paintings ask you to be faster on your feet in responding to them. You have to concentrate differently on your looking.

I don't know of anything else in contemporary art quite like Deutsch's recent paintings. That includes his own earlier work. I first noticed it as long ago as the mid-1980s, when he was making very elongated, very painterly panoramic landscape paintings—this was already some fifteen years into an exhibition history that had begun when Deutsch was still in his twenties—but really got knocked sideways in the early 1990s by the “rotunda” paintings showing masses of framed portraits hanging in a domed space. His art always seemed to ask questions about how and why one sees what one sees, “taking advantage of and highlighting the viewer's perceptual processes,” as Alfred Sturtevant wrote back in 1986, “in ways that more traditional painting includes but deemphasizes”; it envisages the peculiarity of the everyday. But while I tried to follow Deutsch's work over the years—as it has evolved through more twists and turns than do most artists' oeuvres—I only got to know him a little better fairly recently, and that through the urging of his fellow artist Ugo Rondinone, a fervent admirer who has described Deutsch's paintings as “negotiations with the physical dimensions and sensorial capacities of the human figure; with the desire to see and to find meaning in chaotic conditions” that “tell a dual story about the fragility of painting and the fragility of human existence.” As it happens it was also Rondinone who introduced Deutsch to Eva Presenhuber, who then suggested that Adam Lindemann of Venus Over Manhattan sees it too. That seems appropriate. Artists understand artists first and then the rest of us follow after.

Barry Schwabsky

David Deutsch was born in 1943 in Los Angeles, CA, and has lived and worked in New York, NY, since 1970. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *Slow and Fast*, Deutsch + Kwartler at PRACTISE, Oak Park, IL, (2018); Kerry Schuss, New York, NY (2016); and *Neighbors and Strangers* at Feature Inc., New York, NY, (2013). His work is included in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN; Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ; UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

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