

Roberto Bordo

*PAINT WORLD*

23 Jun – 25 Aug 2023

The Upstairs at 39 Walker

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Bortolami is pleased to present *PAINT WORLD*, an exhibition of new paintings by Robert Bordo and his second solo show at the gallery, presented in The Upstairs.

Six of Bordo's monumental planets populate the gallery. Deftly executed with impressionistic touch, Bordo's universal forms float in a brushy monochromatic space. He traced each perfect circle with a compass, and filled their forms with land masses and currents, painted in oil, rendering immediately recognizable yet uncanny globes; a form we recognize with a geography we question.

Bordo's new works revisit the motif for the third time in his oeuvre. He first painted his worlds in 1985, and later again in 1999, with each thematic iteration formally and temporally considered anew. While Bordo's diminutive globes from the 1980s and early 2000s evince the delicate brushwork of nineteenth-century French symbolist painting, the patches of earth in his new works evoke Günther Förg's multi-colored clusters, James Ensor's expressionistic palette, or his mentor Philip Guston's hash marks. Bordo plays with both volume and flatness in these works, producing topographical surfaces that range from impastoed swathes of paint to tiny detailed brushwork. In the preface to *The Painting of Modern Life*, T.J. Clark suggests that painting, "above all, wonderfully, robs reality of words. Its world is sensuous and concentrated but also reduced; it is a world of procedures and orders thrown up by the special behaviour of the medium"—an idea of facture and worldbuilding at the heart of Bordo's practice.

Bordo integrates his abstract painting language with themes and metaphors that reflect his interest in landscape, modernist painting, and memory, often at the edges of political concerns. Each globe has its own personality; a world unto itself, so to speak, which he considered within the legacy of Jean Honoré Fragonard's eighteenth-century "fantasy figures." While the French painter rendered spirited, though imaginary, portraits of people, Bordo has rendered a solar system of invented earths filled with speculative futures. Simultaneously cynical and sincere, the new earths of *PAINT WORLD* orbit around utopian idealism, flat-earth propaganda, contested histories, and climate change, the "real world" becoming momentarily the apparition.

The world—our world—has expanded and contracted tremendously in the last few decades. The paintings' subject(s) also acknowledge "the world" as a cultural construct, a phrase to describe the micro- and macrocosmic—from the planet humans inhabit to a synecdoche encapsulating our environs; our dreams, friendships, social lives, the art world. In *PAINT WORLD*, Bordo endeavors to deliver both implicit critical concern about the state of the world and allow some hopeful respite from it.

Robert Bordo (b. 1949 in Montreal, Québec) has lived in New York since 1972. He was an Associate Professor of Art at The Cooper Union, New York, where he led the painting program from 1996 until 2017. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include Foreland, Catskill, NY; The National Exemplar, New York, NY; Bortolami, New York, NY; and Alexander and Bonin Gallery, New York, NY. His paintings have been featured in exhibitions at MoMA PS1, Queens, NY; the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; the Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE; the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, Switzerland; Artists Space, New York, NY; among many others. His work is also held in several collections including SFMoMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hammer Museum, and the Blanton Museum of Art. Bordo has been the recipient of many prestigious awards, fellowships, and residencies including PRAKSIS Oslo, the Robert de Niro Sr. Painting Prize, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, Canada Council Arts Grants, the Tesuque Foundation Arts Fellowship Award, a MacDowell Colony Fellowship, and a Painting Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.