

Raffi Kalenderian

Eighteen with a Bullet

May 25 – July 06, 2024

Opening: May 24, 6 - 8 pm

11-13 Rue des Arquebusiers, Paris

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present the seventh solo exhibition by Raffi Kalenderian (*1981 in Los Angeles, where he lives and works). It is the artist's first solo outing in our Paris gallery and his first exhibition in France.

Kalenderian created eleven new paintings of various sizes for the show and six works on paper. They are a continuation of his series of signature-style portraits of friends and fellow artists which he depicts in intimate moments of introspection, gazing, or casual activity. Each work's setting and narrative are personally connected with the LA-based artist.

Rendered with meticulous attention to detail and with a vibrant color palette, Kalenderian's portraits transcend mere representation, capturing the essence and personality of his subjects with sensitivity and depth. Through his skillful use of light, shadow and perspective, he imbues his figures with a sense of presence and emotional resonance, inviting viewers to engage with the inner worlds of his subjects.

Parallel to the presentation of new works Kalenderian will perform at an interactive installation called *Raffi's & AI's* together with his artist friend Alberto Cuadros. *Raffi's & AI's* is an in-situ bar installation containing eighteen works by fellow artists. Galerie Peter Kilchmann was the first gallery to host Kalenderian and his pop-up bar in our booth at Art Basel Miami in 2023. The Paris edition of the installation will be its fourth rendition.

The central painting in the exhibition *Studio (18 with a bullet)*, 2020-2024, oil on canvas, 152 x 213 cm, lends its title to the show. It is both a reference to the number of works by different artists present in the bar installation as well as the song *18 with a Bullet* by English songwriter Pete Wingfield (b. 1948). Music and individual songs are often catalysts for the Californian artist's paintings. The work is meta in the truest sense in that it contains several paintings of the show within itself. Here, the artist gives us a look into his studio where he spends most of his time and where he works on his creative process, often in isolation. It hence builds a counterpoint to the social activity often associated with a bar. The artist will be present at the opening and will serve drinks in *Raffi's & AI's* on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon during Paris Gallery Weekend on May 25 and 26.

Kalenderian graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2004 with a degree in Fine Arts. Since then, his work has been exhibited in many international solo and group exhibitions in the US and Europe, including Kunstmuseum St. Gallen; University Art Museum, Long Beach; Santa Barbara Museum of Art; Nassima Landau Foundation; Tel Aviv; McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco; Saatchi Gallery, London; at Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles; Miles McEnery Gallery, New York, and many others. His works are in the collections of the Georgia Museum of Art, Athens (US); Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin; and Santa Barbara Museum of Art, among others. In 2021, for the portrait gallery of the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, Kalenderian portrayed the Austrian theater and opera director Nikolaus Bachler, who led the State Opera as artistic director from 2008 – 2021. The work is currently exhibited in the Portrait Gallery of the State Opera.

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Artist Statement

“I've seen things you people wouldn't believe... Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion... I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain... Time to die.”

Paris and Madrid are the two cities that made me fall in love with painting. The Musée d'Orsay and El Prado were the two museums that lit a fire in 20-year-old me, just being inside these historic institutions caused me to beautifully lose my mind with inspiration and possibility. I returned to my studies at UCLA fully prepared to dedicate my life to this dumbass, useless activity.

I returned to both museums when I was 40, and found myself in even more of a state of inspired artistic psychosis, but with an element of reflection: these paintings all stayed the same, but I was the one who changed. It was beautiful to travel through time and return to my twin painting Meccas, deep humility complementing the original inspiration (I often envy my younger, arrogant, dumbass self). If I survive to be 60...80...100, what are the paintings that will speak to me then? I love thinking about this!!!

For my first show in Paris, I am titling the exhibition after Pete Wingfeld's 1975 anachronistic doo wop song "Eighteen with a Bullet". The song uses wordplay on hit record chart position (a "bullet", in record-chart parlance, refers to a song still selling strongly and/or moving up the charts) yet the lyrics also describe a horny 18-year-old, combining for a double entendre par excellence. I thought this would be a great way to pick 18 total works, a combination of paintings and drawings, as a way to introduce myself and work to stylish and discerning Parisians. I love Paris, especially how hard people of Paris go in terms of personal fashion. An 86-year-old man in will walk into whatever the Parisian version of a CVS is (Le CVS?) wearing bright purple polka dot trousers, smoking a cigarette, and donning a severe expression that says "of course I am wearing these purple, polka-dotted trousers! What else would I wear??"

This show is about my friends, my life, and my process. How things can take a long time (years even!) but that it all just adds layers and meaning to the work. It's also about how much I love and am inspired by French painting, despite being this half-Armenian guy from LA. I've included a small drawing of Yves St Laurent, some moonlight bathers, my brother reading in his room, friends of mine from the seminal Sacramento band G.Green back from when they stayed at my Los Angeles Studio back in 2015 (painting friends and putting them in a Paris show is great way to reach out and say hello if you haven't been in touch for a while).

Edgar, Dave, Anna and Chris are also friends who have been put through my own overly drama lens, and onto canvas. please don't take anything you see in these works as a comment on these wonderful, well-adjusted people :). There is also veeerrry late wedding present for Peter and Alessandro, a small painting of visionary musician Gram Parsons, another of my friend Paul Cauhas (himself a post-punk legend based in Poland), my incomparable friends Louis and Andrea, a heroically-scaled painting of the great poet Dasha Nekrasova, and to top it off, a painting of my studio depicting all of the other works in the show.

"Portrait of the poet Dasha Nekrasova" depicts my friend Dasha, staring directly at the viewer, defiant and self-possessed. It was from a night of poetry she organized in 2015 at Alberto Cuadros' gallery Sade. Before this night, if Dasha ever talked about her poetry, she would roll her eyes, as though it was **so embarrassing and pathetic** that she was a poet. For this particular reading, however, she curated a group of poets she admired wore this beautiful vintage dress. She was so strong and self-assured that night. I was so proud of her. I think every creative person has to cross this bridge at some point, and admit to themselves and to the world "I am a poet! Who cares what you, or anyone thinks!" I made three of these poet paintings, but this one has never been shown publicly and is my favorite of the group.

Sometimes I make work just for me, that I don't even see as "art". And sometimes, over years, maybe even a decade, I finally come around and admit to myself: "yes, this is art buddy, and in fact, it is one of your favorite things you've ever made." An example of this is a painting of my friend Louis that I started in 2010. We met in the dorms at UCLA, and he is like a brother to me. He is of Sicilian descent, one of the hairiest people I have ever met (the hair per square inch he can grow on his face is legendary; something only seen in the Greek sculpture of antiquity). Louis, at this point, had refused to grow his beard long, so I started a painting in 2010 combining Louis' face with the beard of Van Gogh's postman, to show him the potential he has. Fast forward to now, and Louis has a huge beard! So the painting itself is a follicular prophecy. (Louis and his girlfriend Andrea are both coming to Paris for the show, so I thought it was perfect to have this painting of Louis in the show).

Being from LA means the oldest building we have is a Taco Bell that was erected in the 1970s. For comparison (although the sage bald, philosopher Jeff Van Gundy warns us "comparison is the thief of joy"), Fabian Marti hosted a dinner in Zurich once in a building untouched since the 1300s. Los Angeles' comparative lack of history allows an idiot painter like me to dive into painting's rich history without shame (for better or worse!) Someone once told me there is a word in Russian that translates to: "This probably isn't going to work, but I'm going to do it anyway". I don't know what that word is, or if it even really exists, but I think it perfectly describes the freedom I feel to use the past as a springboard, and to make the work that is most exciting to me.

As part of this solo exhibition, we will have one room dedicated to an ongoing artist bar project I'm doing with my friend Alberto Cuadros. Our idea is to have a pop-up artists' bar in the vein

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe...French cops rollerblading outside the Louvre...people throwing soup at the Mona Lisa even though Da Vinci's Saint John the Baptist is much less guarded and by far the superior painting... I've flashed an official badge to sneak a minibar disguised as a crate into Art Basel Miami Beach, the Convention Center security lights glittering above gate C. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain... Time to die.

Raffi Kalendarian

May 7th, 2024