

## PRESS RELEASE

**Chase Hall**

**Momma's Baby, Daddy's Maybe**

**May 23 – July 19, 2025**

**Opening on Thursday, May 22, 6 – 9 pm**

**Artist talk with Chase Hall & Jasper Sharp, 6.30 pm**

**Lichtenfelsgasse 5, A-1010 Vienna**

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Momma's Baby, Daddy's Maybe*, the gallery's second solo exhibition with the US artist Chase Hall. For his first exhibition in Vienna, Hall has produced a series of new paintings and works on paper. The title, a phrase used to question the complexities of parenthood, shapes the context of the exhibition as a whole: an intensely personal meditation on the question of belonging.

Painted at his studios in the Hudson Valley and the East Village of New York, the works are almost entirely portraits. Some depict individual characters – a golfer in tie, cardigan and forest green breeches, or a movie theatre cashier framed within his curtained kiosk – while others portray groups of young men, from cowboys to tennis players. The subjects are aware that they are being looked at, just as we are ourselves. There is honesty in the confrontation. They share a sense of poise and quiet dignity, and despite their various props and accoutrements (musical instruments, sports equipment, pet animals) are less narrative than they first appear. Several of the young men seem to recall the practice of models that frequented the workshops of old master painters. But they are not representations of actual people; they only assume a sense of identity as the paintings develop or sit to dry after Hall has finished with them.

Born in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in 1993 to a white mother and a Black father, Hall had a difficult childhood and adolescence. He took up photography at a young age, and the ambition to become a photojournalist brought him to New York where he walked the streets amassing a vast trove of portraits. Encountering many pivotal paintings across New York's museums led him to take his drawings off lined paper to paintings on cotton canvas, which in turn provided the sense of structure, routine and meaning that he desperately needed.

The works first emerge as rough charcoal sketches on raw cotton canvas. The act of painting itself begins at the face, specifically the eyeline, with the application of brown tones derived from coffee beans. Cotton and coffee, these crops are central to colonial economies and trade, have become his elemental materials. Streaks of unpainted canvas create the delineating contours that define form, reminiscent of African woodblock prints. Vibrant hues of jade, warm crimson and lilac acrylic stain the fabric of his subjects' clothes, behind which Hall layers textured and occasionally feverish backgrounds. We begin to find symbols buried within them: letters, numbers, faces, figures, hearts, eyes, and musical notes, an entire lexicon of personal hieroglyphs. Figuration and abstraction act in lockstep, tugging our gaze cross the painted ridges of the canvas.

"The place in which I'll fit will not exist until I make it," wrote the essayist and novelist James Baldwin. Hall's paintings represent a purposeful attempt to pursue something similar, to make sense of his place in the world, in society, in his family, in his skin. Through his cast of surrogates, and depictions of Black life at different moments in American history, he is looking at his own history and background. It is a tale in hybridity, of having to be two things at once: brown and white, vulnerable and strong, together and apart. Belonging everywhere and nowhere. The mule-come-zebra that carries its master is no different: white with grey stripes, grey with white stripes, camouflaged but ultimately visible.

The figures do not simply inhabit their spaces; they contest and complicate them. The activities that Hall chooses for them – golf, tennis, equestrian sports – have strong, generational associations to class and race. Sport provides the opportunity for belonging, to be part of a collective. Like music, it also offers a pathway to social mobility and recognition, and a means to overcome discrimination. From obstacle to optimism. Clothes, a particular interest of

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the artist, do something similar, as tools of transformation to raise oneself up and step into another sense of being. The pictures that Hall paints are questions as much as proposals: questions about the past and present, and proposals for the future.

## *Jasper Sharp*

Chase Hall (b. 1993 in Saint Paul, MN) lives and works between New York City and Upstate New York. He has been an artist in residence at The Mountain School of Arts, Los Angeles, CA; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA; and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME. In 2022 he was commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY, to produce a large diptych to accompany its production of Luigi Cherubini's *Medea*, a work which was subsequently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. The following year his first solo museum exhibition opened at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Museum of Art in Savannah, GA. His works are held in the collections of institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA; The Studio Museum, Harlem, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, NY; and The Whitney Museum, New York, NY, among others.

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