

Billy Sullivan

kaufmann repetto is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of works by Billy Sullivan.

The exhibition is accompanied by the release of the artist's first monograph, *Still, Looking. Works 1969–2016*, published by Edition Patrick Frey. With essays by William J. Simmons and Linda Yablonsky, the book explores the relationship in Sullivan's work between painting, drawing and photography. The gallery will present a book launch and panel discussion at the Swiss Institute in May.

Sullivan's work straddles the vitality of fleeting moments and the construction of retrieved remembrance. His subjects are friends, allies, and collaborators. "I am never a voyeur," he says. "The subject is always a participant." Linda Yablonsky writes, "Billy is a diarist who doesn't just represent. He interprets. Sometimes he invents." According to art historian William J. Simmons, "Sullivan combines a Warholian world, wherein the archiving of life is so second-nature and immediate as to defy theorization, with an intensely rigorous excavation and recombination of past avant-gardes."

One of the first critics to assess Sullivan's work was the late poet and artist Rene Ricard, who in a 1978 review evoked both the "floating world" of Ukiyo-e painting and the 18th-century pastel-painters La Tour and Liotard. In *Rene, June 1979* (2016), the poet regards us quizzically as he floats on an expanse of paper untouched by powdery pastels, anchored only by a horizontal scrawl of strokes that seem to have emerged from his own pen. This simplicity and restraint are echoed in *Sunflowers* (2016), and in the quiet tones of *Rachel* (2010). By contrast, in *Cookie* (2016) the late writer and actress Cookie Mueller presides in her kitchen, seemingly clad in tongues of red flame. Her kindred spirit, *Sharon* (2011), confronts us head-on, as bristling blues, reds and yellows offset her piercing green eyes.

These alternating aspects of direct engagement and absorbed rumination are united in three works focusing on Sullivan's husband, the esteemed curator and writer Klaus Kertess. In *Town Line Beach* (2016), Klaus gazes out to sea, oblivious to the young woman lying with her boyfriend, even as horizontal rhythms contain them within a unified pictorial space. On the other hand, the painting *Klaus and Klaus* (2015–16) exhibits him as a public figure and a historical muse, posing gamely beside a 1976 portrait of himself by Chuck Close. In the space between these two poses we glimpse not only a long career in the art world, but also half a lifespan.

Klaus in Tulum (2003) reveals a more private glimpse. Here he lies in bed, naked yet tantalizingly out of reach, veiled behind a diaphanous mosquito netting. Meanwhile, the table in the foreground offers a nearly allegorical array of objects—fruit, books, matches, reading glasses, and an enormous pineapple whose tousled crown seems to channel the painting's erotic undercurrent. By pairing the genre trope of a tabletop still life with the male nude, Sullivan orchestrates what Simmons describes as "an alienating yet sensual landscape" that is simultaneously self-absorbed and inviting.

Klaus in Tulum also exemplifies Sullivan's frequent use of a "sliding, expectant perspective" (as Simmons describes), which threatens (or promises) to dump the painting's contents into our laps. Two other works share this disorienting formal device: *Patrick* (2016), a portrait of Sullivan's publisher, Patrick Frey, surrounded (like Sharon) by fragments of the artist's world. Here, the table's tilted plane invites us into Patrick's orbital path within the studio's gravitational force. But in *Amaryllis on a Tiger Rug* (2011), a nearly seven-foot-tall pastel, the pull is in two directions at once, simultaneously toward the bottom edge and upwards, like an all-encompassing embrace, as the tiger rug stretches out at our feet and the blossoms thrust their faces directly up and into ours.

Billy Sullivan (b. 1946) has been exhibiting nationally and internationally since 1971. He has been included in important exhibitions such as Ugo Rondinone's *I Love John Giorno* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2015); *GLAM! The Performance of Style*, Tate Liverpool (2014); *Open Windows*, Addison Gallery of American Art, curated by Carroll Dunham (2012); *Come Closer: Art Around the Bowery, 1969-1989*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2012); *Whitney Biennial: Day for Night*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2006). His recent solo exhibitions include shows at Ille Arts, Amagansett, New York (2015); Galerie Sabine Knust, Munich (2014); Freymond-Guth Fine Arts, Zurich (2014); Nicole Klagsbrun, New York (2012); kaufmann repetto, Milan (2011); Baldwin Gallery, Aspen, Colorado (2011); Salomon Contemporary, East Hampton, New York (2010); and Regen Projects, Los Angeles (2008). His paintings are currently in the *2016 Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts* at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York. Sullivan's work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Parrish Art Museum, and the Denver Art Museum, as well as many other public and private collections.