

SPENCER SWEENEY
THE PHARAOH'S LOUNGE - PARTY PAINTINGS AND SAUNA

November 19 – December 17, 2011
Opening reception: 6-8

Gavin Brown's enterprise

620 Greenwich Street, New York
212 627 5258
T – Sa, 10AM – 6PM

Spencer Sweeney, born and raised in Philadelphia, is a painter, musician and owner of Santa's Party House at 100 Lafayette St, two blocks below Canal. Sweeney is a cultural titan, bestriding the city, yet cloaked from view. He is one the best kept secrets in New York. He is not JUST a painter and not JUST an impresario. Santa's Party House is not JUST the best piece of Relational Aesthetics since the Chat Noir. Not JUST the only place to dance in New York. If the Cabaret Voltaire and Paradise Garage had a baby, it would look and sound like Santa's. So what does that make Spencer Sweeney? Someone past time. An artist defined by his love and curiosity for the best of what we make and what we can make possible.

In his upcoming show at GBE Sweeney presents paintings in a most utilitarian form: The painting as an advertisement with a time and a price and a location. The event? A party. A reason to live. A reason to live in New York City. Hand made to be seen by millions, they are thrown out on the wires and the wireless to alert the party people of a reason to gather. These are paintings in drag, dressed to the nines as commerce. Ads for the weekend, disguised as Fine Art. Oil transfigured into ones and zeros. A party contained in a painting. Less oil, more dancing.

The Pharaoh's Lounge is Sweeney's fourth solo exhibition at the gallery.

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“From his role as the only non-female in the seminal “fake,” rock band Actress (was it an artist, the American Fine Arts gallery house band, a protest against the boredom of nightlife, a fashion show with noise?) to his recent production of dance records under the name "Housing Projects", Spencer Sweeney has always exploited the allure and excitement of music in order to get attention and remake his public persona. Meanwhile, his exhibitions of paintings and drawings throughout the past few years have revealed - by turns - an anarchic, wild boy sensibility reminiscent of Kippenberger/Oehlen or early Peter Saul and, in his daily pen and pencil drawings, an elegant graphic approach that seems to channel both the visionary hand and ear of William Blake and the precision social caricatures of 19th century dandy Constantin Guys. Whether dealing with images or sounds, Sweeney's primary concerns are the corrosive and emancipatory potentials of public exposure, and the tactical re-appropriation of pop and sub-cultural codes in order to turn them back against the homogenizing force of the very culture he takes them from.

In his case, music and painting are not the parallel occupations of an information age multi-tasker, they are interchangeable, throw-away stances in an urban milieu that always manages to put us to work no matter how bored or lazy or confused we in fact are. Music is an escape from the laborious piling up of static fine art objects. Painting is a rejection of the entropic time of bars and clubs. Neither is enough but together they can be almost too much, and in Sweeney's art this double activity creates a zone of indistinction where the limits and definitions of each practice are constantly blurred and redrawn. Sweeney proposes a model of work that is less about professionalism and the fabrication of signature products than the ecstatic unworking of a subjectivity always already put to work in the non-stop consumption of lifestyle choices.

It is a kind of impassioned indifference to styles and forms that allows him to elaborate the joyful and perverse distances he opens up between his role as a cultural producer and the steady output of new sensations and perceptions. Whether concocting psychedelic illustrations of impossible, hybrid life-forms (drag queen scat-skaters, cum guzzling Jesus impersonators, etc.) or creating raucous, multi-layered canvases - sometimes prissily rendered in rainbow hues, other times piggishly thrown down in drunken strokes of black or white or physically pierced by plastic flowers, Sweeney unleashes new and unexpected worlds 'more scary and more free' in energetic compositions devised from the ruins and fragments of this one.

Since his brush with death in a rickshaw accident in October of 2003, Spencer Sweeney has reassessed his role

as a cultural producer in a world where everything changes except the fact that nothing much happens anymore. Sweeney's post-rickshaw moment is one of cold-eyed clarity, a time of looking forward and inward, a time to dig deeper into the crates and into the mud of subjectivity. In order to lay hold of it there where it is made to happen and destroy it one more time, in order to re-appropriate its constant destruction and begin again from there."

- John Kelsey