

VIEWING ROOM

JOEL MESLER

THE ALPHABET OF CREATION (FOR NOW)



20 APRIL – 26 MAY 2018

PRIVATE VIEW: THURSDAY, 19 APRIL 6 – 8 PM
LONDON

As part of its Viewing Room programme, Simon Lee Gallery is pleased to present *The Alphabet of Creation (for now)* an exhibition of new works by New York-based artist and art dealer Joel Mesler. For his first solo presentation in the UK, Mesler will exhibit new paintings from his ongoing body of work based on the alphabet, in which each painting is devoted to a single letter, drawing on memories from his childhood and his hometown of Los Angeles.

Although Mesler's autobiographical paintings evoke illustrations from a children's alphabet book, his distinctive style imbues them with a dark wit that reveals pivotal moments from his life. The arms of the individual lowercase letters snake in and around a pattern of overlapping green leaves, a recurring motif in his work that is based on the Martinique wallpaper at the Beverly Hills Hotel – a place that, for Mesler, evokes powerful childhood memories:

“At the beginning of my parents' divorce” he recalls, “We had brunch at the Beverly Hills Hotel. My father threw the brunch table over; the eggs Benedict ran down the side of the table onto my mother's lap and he had a nervous breakdown. My mother chased him in our station wagon while my brother and I ran after him on foot. That was my point of arrested development.” He says, half-jokingly. “That's when I stopped being a normal person, I think.”

Composed on raw linen, the quick-witted drawings and hand-rendered texts are typically deadpan in their humour, while the bold leafy pattern and graphic elements recall the vernacular of Los Angeles and Southern California design. In some cases, the letters are rendered as snakes, reminiscent of the serpent in the Garden of Eden; in other works the head and tail are replaced by pointing hands, referencing the biblical story of creation. Above all, these paintings can be read as wry and self-deprecating commentary on Mesler's roles as a father, artist and art dealer, with the hand of judgement pointing to geographical locations that mark significant moments in the genesis of his personal evolution.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Joel Mesler was born in Los Angeles, CA in 1974 and lives and works in New York, NY. He received an MFA from San Francisco Art Institute. Since opening his first gallery, Dianne Pruess, in Los Angeles, CA in 2000, he has worked as both a dealer and an artist. He has operated several galleries over the past two decades, including Feuer/Mesler in New York, NY, Rental in Los Angeles, CA and New York, NY, Untitled in New York, NY, and Retrospective in Hudson, NY. Recent exhibitions include *Most of it is my money*, presented at Harper's Books, New York, NY (2018); *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, Kantor Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2017); *The Estate of Joel Mesler*, presented by Cultural Counsel at NADA, NY (2016); *Fish People*, presented by Sotheby's S2 and Cultural Counsel at the Surf Lodge in Montauk, NY (2016); and *American People*, Torri Gallery, Paris (2016).

LIVE PORTRAIT PAINTING BY THE ARTIST

On the occasion of the exhibition, and for two days only, Joel Mesler will be carrying out live portrait painting at the gallery, offering visitors the unique opportunity to engage with his practice in a very active and personal way. The 12 x 9 in. acrylic on canvas portraits will be painted by Mesler live in the gallery space, and available to buy for £200 each. With his trademark wit and idiosyncratic figurative style, the portraits will be composed with an economy of gesture and palette that is intrinsic to his work. Contrary to the works in the exhibition that are autobiographical and self-reflective, here Mesler turns his attention to the subject of the sitter.

The artist will be available for live portrait painting on **Friday 20 April** and **Saturday 21 April, 12 – 5pm**. Booking is not required, but portraits will be carried out on a first come first served basis.

For further press information, images and requests please contact Julia Kelly Kennedy: julia@simonleegallery.com / 020 7491 0100.