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JUDITH EISLER: *RIFFS. JARMAN'S CARAVAGGIO.*

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 6-8PM

ON VIEW: SEPTEMBER 6 - OCTOBER 20

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce the opening of Judith Eisler: *Riffs. Jarman's Caravaggio*. For the artist's first exhibition with the gallery, Eisler presents a new series of paintings based on Derek Jarman's 1986 film "Caravaggio".

Judith Eisler paints cinematic close-ups sourced from her own photographs of paused film scenes. With a lifelong interest in film, Eisler often returns to the work of filmmakers such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Derek Jarman. In consideration of the formal properties of light, color and space within a single film frame, the artist considers an image's capacity to exist as both real and fictional. As each image undergoes multiple layers of mediation, Eisler's renderings shift between representational and abstract. Working with oil on canvas, Eisler directs our view to the visual optics of cinematic happenings.

The film "Caravaggio" depicts the story of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's (1571 - 1610) life, filtered through the lens of filmmaker Derek Jarman (1942 - 1994). The script expands upon the sanctioned narratives of what might have occurred. If the film is at all biographical, it is in Jarman's fidelity to the color, light and tableaux of Caravaggio's paintings. Jarman either recreates or refers to a number of Caravaggio's paintings such as *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (1593), *The Lute Player* (1596), *Penitent Magdalene* (1594-95), and *The Deposition* (1602-03). The actors and sets are staged and illuminated in a visual style that echoes the dramatic light infusing Caravaggio's paintings.

Love, lust, and violence permeate both Caravaggio's paintings and Jarman's film. While watching the film, Eisler paused the action and took photographs of this fusion of sensibilities, establishing distance in order to study emotionally and psychologically charged themes with a dispassionate eye. Eisler's photographs capture the transformation of painting through staged reality, film, and transmission. In working from these stills, the artist is rendering and reanimating the material as it is dematerialized. Despite the abstractions caused by the technological interference in this process, a structure is formed: the sum of the parts creates a whole that is simultaneously present and falling into fragmentation.

Eisler questions whether light is a substance or a process. In the film, the source of light illuminating the models is indeterminate. Does it stem from an artificial spotlight or is it high noon? Is the glare providing clarity or illumination, or is it hindering the act of seeing? In the portraits of Tilda Swinton as Caravaggio's model, Lena, and Nigel Terry as Caravaggio, faces brace against the glare or lower their eyes to turn their gaze inward. Eisler's interest lies not in recreating the subject of the gaze, which is visible in the film sequence, but to describe what it looks like when someone is seeing.

In the film, *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew* (1599-1600) is sketched out on a canvas. Terry, as Caravaggio, manipulates his model (Sean Bean) to perfectly mimic the pose in the painting. Eisler was initially interested in how the proto-cinematic light that suffuses Caravaggio's paintings might be transformed when viewed through a filmic interpretation of his work. As she watched Jarman's recreation of the artist at work in his studio, Eisler became less interested in painting the physical reenactment of the composition than in describing what it looks like to make something. In turn, the artist began making paintings about the materiality of making a painting. As the brush lifts color to canvas and materials are arranged on the palette, Eisler considers the elements that make up an illusionistic whole.

The palette compositions can be seen as a stage upon which material and tools are laid out in anticipation of the rendering of the subject. Eisler painted several versions of the palette in order to reflect the painter's preoccupation with raw material and the shifts that occur on that particular flat surface. There are solvents housed in decanters, colors, brushes, both active and at rest. In some of the frames, coins are also depicted, evoking the marriage of art and commerce. But even as the elements seem fixed and interconnected, at the same time they seem on the verge of falling apart, sliding off the table onto the floor.

Jarman uses candles to illuminate the "17th century" studio where the painter works into the night. The candles burn as the wax melts and the expansiveness of the flame is tempered by the simultaneous diminishment of the material. Similarly, the film still contains the seeds for its own disintegration: what appears before our eyes in one moment will transition into something else in the next frame. That moment between what has happened and what is to happen is open to possibility and chance. Things still happen when one is not looking.

Eisler received her BFA from Cornell University in 1984. She has been exhibiting her work since 1995 at venues such as Kunsthalle, Vienna; Hall Art Foundation/Schloss Derneburg Museum, Hanover, Germany; White Columns, New York; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Bass Museum, Miami, FL; Hayward Gallery, London; and Castello di Rivoli, Turin. In 2002, she was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. Eisler is a professor at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, Austria, and lives and works between Vienna, Austria and Warren, Connecticut.

