

GAGOSIAN



DAN COLEN

High Noon

Opening reception: Friday, November 2, 6–8pm
November 2–December 15, 2018
456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills

Dan Colen, *The Trap*, 2016–18, oil on canvas, 116 1/2 × 154 1/2 inches (295.9 × 392.4 cm). Photo: Tim Nighswander/IMAGING4ART

October 22, 2018

Gagosian is pleased to present *High Noon*, an exhibition of *Desert* paintings by Dan Colen.

Colen's early works were hyperrealistic paintings of lived-in interiors—a cluttered bathroom, a messy bedroom, a camping tent—that included supernatural or religious figures, including Jesus Christ, the ghost of his grandfather, and flying cartoon cherubim. Frustrated by what he perceived as a limited discourse surrounding photorealism, Colen shifted his focus to making paintings using unconventional media—chewing gum, trash, tar and feathers, soil, and metal studs—as well as papier-mâché works, animatronic sculptures, lifelike nude self-portraits, and uncanny installations incorporating flags, sneakers, and handmade replicas of beer bottles and cigarette butts.

Over the last four years, Colen has returned to representational oil painting through more formalist investigations into the “materiality of color” and “the objecthood of paint.” Made alongside the *Mother* paintings (2017–18), which explore notions of safety and fear, and the *Purgatory* paintings (2017–18), which consider the sublime through abstract and cartoon references, the *Desert* paintings (2016–18) are lush yet schematic interpretations of stills from Chuck Jones’s animated shorts featuring Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. In the very first episode, *Fast and Furry-ous* (1949), Coyote attempts to trick the Road Runner by painting a trompe l’oeil tunnel on the side of a cliff. To Coyote’s astonishment, the bird runs right through the tunnel without breaking stride, yet when he attempts hot pursuit, Coyote slams into the rockface, unable to enter the space of his own painting.

Eliminating the protagonists, Colen paints the tunnel from two different angles, as well as other scenes from the desert landscape in the cartoon. The paint is applied to the canvas with the bare minimum of oil, producing a variety of surfaces—from matte to waxy—that emphasize the fundamental physical qualities of the material. Though based on found images, the canvases veer toward hard-edge abstraction, juxtaposing earthy and artificial tones while contrasting flat planes with perspectival or volumetric details, such as craggy rock formations and expressionistic shrubs. *The Great Silence* (2016–18) shows the ochre earth and a gray-brown road leading into a striking triangular plane of chemical yellow; *The Trap* and *The Reward* (both 2016–18) pair shades of cobalt with rusty reds and fluorescent oranges; and *The Mercenary* (2016–18) offers a view of the ground alone, tufts of grass and a single green plant adding gestural moments to the otherwise geometric scene. To underscore the three-dimensionality of the paintings, Colen chose to extend each image around the sides of the canvases, evoking the lacquered sculptures of John McCracken.

Drawing inspiration from Brice Marden’s smooth encaustic planes and the crisp yet organic delineations in Georgia O’Keeffe’s biomorphic landscapes, the *Desert Paintings* merge art historical and spiritual allusions with popular art forms, such as cartoons, stage sets, and billboards. In effect, they not only attest to the centrality of painting in Colen’s oeuvre, but conversely also shed light on the themes of performance, trickery, and belief that course through the broader history of painting. It is no coincidence that he sets these questions within the landscape of the American West, where the sublime is freighted with more insidious intentions, like those of Wile E. Coyote towards the carefree and unsuspecting Road Runner.

A fully illustrated catalogue with a text by Douglas Fogle will accompany the exhibition.

Dan Colen was born in Leonia, New Jersey, in 1979, and lives and works in New York. Collections include the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens; Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; and Jiménez-Colón Collection, Ponce, Puerto Rico. Recent institutional exhibitions include the Whitney Biennial, New York (2006); *Peanuts*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2011); *The Illusion of Life*, Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Scotland (2013); 12th Biennale de Lyon, France (2013); *Help!*, Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, CT (2014); *The L...o...n...g Count*, Walter De Maria building, New York (2014); *Psychic Slayer*, Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2015); *Shake the Elbow*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (2015); *Oil Painting*, Dallas Contemporary (2016); *Sweet Liberty*, Newport Street Gallery, London (2017); and *Dan Colen – Works from the Astrup Fearnley Collection*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2018).

#DanColen

Press

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