

Press release

April 2012

Joe Bradley, Pigpen

April 26 to May 26, 2012

Opening on Wednesday, April 25, 6 to 8 pm

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present new works by New York-based artist Joe Bradley under the title «Pigpen».

Bradley works in series, an approach that allows him to pursue ideas in painting and then drop them once they cease to interest him. In this way, the artist creates groups of works that over the years, offers a surprising diversity, but always retaining an unmistakable familiarity.

At the 2008 Whitney Biennial, Bradley received attention for a series of monochrome canvases arranged into figurations. Although primarily minimalist experiments à la Ellsworth Kelly, on closer inspection they resolved into crude figures, as their reduced aesthetic evoke association with computer games and primitive totem sculptures. Thanks to these arrangements, and their subtle, narrative titles, the monochrome surfaces, mostly painted on simple, pre-produced canvases, acquired a meaning of their own, addressing 20th-century developments in art theory and taking a playful look at the many and varied artistic experiments on the cusp of abstraction and figuration.

To anyone expecting an artist's oeuvre to develop continually and predictably, the series that followed appears as a spectacular break or turning point—in these «Schmagoo Paintings», the colors vanish. They are gigantic pictogram-like scribbles made with grease pencil on white canvas, oscillating between figuration and abstraction in a way reminiscent of, but entirely different to, the «multi-panel paintings». These minimalist works dramatize universal codes and symbols (a mouth, Superman's S logo, an arrow). Like children's drawings, their reduced visual idiom follows the modernist impulse towards a «primitive art» but with an ironic nod to cartoons, which play a key role in Bradley's work. (Cartoonist Chas Addams (1912–1988) has been an important source of inspiration since Bradley's youth.) The «Schmagoo Paintings» (schmagoo is slang for heroin) are also a humorous search for the archetypal: «The word stuck with me, and I began to think of «Schmagoo» as shorthand for some sort of Cosmic Substance... Primordial Muck. The stuff that gave birth to everything [...] I have been thinking of Painting as a metaphor for the original creative act.» (JB, 2008)

In another series begun recently, he makes large screen prints showing silhouettes of people in the poses of Egyptian figures. Another ongoing series featured in the artist's first solo show at Galerie Eva Presenhuber comprises large-format paintings on unprimed canvases using an artistic vocabulary recalling Guston, Basquiat, and Paleolithic cave paintings. The canvases, mostly painted flat on the floor with a range of instruments, bear the traces of the (performative) processes leading to their creation. The special character of the paintings conserves the physical act of painting, and its style situated somewhere between abstract expressionism and naïve imagery, evokes a broad range of associations.

For further information, please contact Florian Keller (f.keller@presenhuber.com).

Opening hours: Tuesday - Friday, 10am to 6pm
 Saturday, 11am to 5pm
 or by appointment

Forthcoming exhibition: Painting Now
 Opening, June 9, 6 – 8 pm
 Exhibition showing June 10 to July 28, 2012