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Sean Landers

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For his third solo exhibition at rodolphe janssen, Sean Landers continues to explore the meaning of what it is to be a contemporary maker of art. For the last three years Landers has been defining and clarifying themes he has pursued over his three decades long career. Here he will present three distinct groups of paintings, each re-examining the relationship of the artist to his work.

In the series of four paintings depicting a figure made out of wood, Landers has quite literally devised a character out of the materials which support his canvas while painting. The simple and functional design of Landers' easel can be found in the figure he calls "Plankboy." Made of wood planks, hinges and nuts, bolts and screws, "Plankboy" is defined by the fact that he does not quite fit into the world in which he exists. Making his first appearance twenty years ago in a body of work signifying Landers' renewed interest in Rene Magritte's 1947-48 "La Période Vache," Plankboy has been making periodic appearances in the work and has become a visual touchstone for the artist, as if to say, "this is where I am now."

While Plankboy bridges the past with the present, he is also bridging artistic truth with mythology. Here the figure becomes a symbol for the struggle of artistic endeavor and the odds that must be overcome in order to continue to create. In a sense, Plankboy is describing the nature of his own existence. When depicted as an iconic figure in enduring ancient Greek mythology, he is revealing traits inherent in successful makers of art with respect to their work—Pygmalion: make what you love; Daedalus: let it go and hope it endures; Sisyphus: keep trying despite fear of failure; and Narcissus: belief that there is something worthy to offer. These deeply personal tenets to which the artist has remained true throughout his practice were examined in depth in prose in a series of Library Bookcase paintings exhibited in Landers' first solo show at the gallery in 2012. Not coincidentally, Landers utilized wood-grain as the literal basis for containing the books, the vehicle for the prose.

The wood grain makes a reappearance in a number of the small-scale paintings reminiscent of those from his Small Brass Raffle Drum series, which was devised to mine his own oeuvre via a ready-made device. Here Landers is breaking the prior constraints he gave himself, and relying more on spontaneity, photographs from his own travels, popular culture, and art historical references; Landers has allowed himself to free-associate. The resulting paintings hold an element of whimsy and are the direct descendants of the Surrealism proposed by André Breton, Salvatore Dalí, and René Magritte's "La Période Vache."

Rounding out the exhibition are two larger scale paintings depicting old-fashioned wooden signage, such as one would find at a rural crossroads or hiking trail. Here, the wooden signage gives up its purely directional functionality to become a vehicle for prose. Reinventing the visual language of a sign as they are read from top to bottom, and left to right, they impart a greater truth about their eternal existence in the prose they present. Serious and funny at the same time, they provide a direct contact between artist and viewer.

About the artists :

Sean Landers (born 1962, Palmer, Massachusetts, USA) lives and works in New York City. He received his MFA from Yale University School of Art in 1986. His work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions, including the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2010) and the Kunsthalle Zurich (2004), and numerous group exhibitions including "Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney's Collection," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); "Picasso in Contemporary Art," Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Germany (2015); "Aquatopia: The Imaginary of the Ocean Deep," Tate St. Ives, UK (2014), "NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star," New Museum (2013), "Drawing Time, Reading Time, the Drawing Center, New York (2013), "Busted," the High Line, New York (2013-2014), "Midnight Party," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN (2011).