

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Saturn Comes Again, an exhibition of new paintings and a new video by Los Angeles-based artist William E. Jones. The exhibition's opening day is Tuesday, July 2 from 10 AM to 4 PM, and the show will be on view through August 24, 2024.

Over the course of 40 years, Jones has established himself as a unique figure in the worlds of contemporary art, experimental film, and literature. He approaches his work in each of these fields as a researcher, immersing himself in official and unofficial archives. Some of these are archives he assembles by amassing digital and analog materials, and some he creates himself, producing his own images and narratives based on experiences in the past and present. The products of these activities have included photographs, videos, films, collages, appropriations, novels, biographies, and essays.

In Saturn Comes Again, however, Jones has made what is perhaps the most dramatic and paradoxically surprising shift of his career. The exhibition features 14 of the paintings he has been producing over the last two years, signaling not only his commitment to new areas of research and a new medium, but a comprehensive reconsideration of his role as an artist and his points of intersection with his audiences. In keeping with his interest in texts as records of—and engines for—sociopolitical analysis and sexual desire, Jones was inspired to begin painting by the example of a character in his novel I Should Have Known Better. The paintings therefore become living elements in multiple narratives, including the narratives of his own trajectory through the worlds of contemporary art, the Los Angeles art world, and the broader worlds of culture undergoing constant change at the hands of economic and political forces.

At the same time, the paintings reflect Jones's ongoing commitment to research. They depict a range of subjects, some well-known—actress Joan Crawford, writer Georges Perec, musician Lou Reed, artist Gerhard Richter—and some notable only for their

anonymity. What unites is them, in addition to their visual interest, is the provocation they display in both subtle and not-so-subtle forms. Some paintings, for instance, are based on images in gay pornographic magazines from the 1970s, while others make use of images borrowed from popular culture or the annals of art history. Works from one category might resemble works from the other, serving as a reminder that the official record often contains details its authors prefer to hide. Taken together, they constitute an intuitively constructed archive of passions and personalities, as well as a multi-faceted study of the many uses to which the human body can be put.

However, the content of the paintings only tells part of the story. Their formal properties are the result of material experimentation and nuanced thinking about the development of the medium throughout its long history. Characterized by a blurring technique that establishes links with effects in photography and video while accentuating the viscosity and luminosity of oil-based pigments, the paintings are, like many of Jones's videos, sites where representation is made more complex—and paradoxically more tangible—through the use of abstract optical effects. When distinctions between color and shape or between drawing and painterly gesture begin to fall away, the images hover like holograms in a foreground that appears to extend in front of the surface of the canvas support. This allows the paintings to key associations to the past, present, and future and to synthesize close-up emotional resonance with a critical awareness—and biting humor—that time them into the larger fabric of Jones's project.

Connections between emotion, observation, and analysis play a prominent role in Stimulus (2024), the new video included in the exhibition, which features images of a series of photographs published by pioneering French neurologist Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne in 1862. The photographs documented a study called The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression in which de Boulogne used electrical probes to generate involuntary facial expressions in psychiatric patients. An important influence on figures like Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud whose ideas would go on to shape the intellectual trajectory of the twentieth century, de Boulogne sought to bring scientific

rigor to the classification of what has often been considered an entirely subjective facet of human experience.

Jones brings an analogous sense of order to an archive of images that is alternately grotesque, moving, and puzzling. Stimulus is the latest of his works—others include Killed and Model Workers—to create narrative motion by positioning still images in a sequence that helps reveal their distinct non-objective qualities. Here, for instance, an uncanny choreography of symmetry and asymmetry is on display out as one image gives way to the next. Because de Boulogne sometimes used black forms to obscure half of his subjects' faces, Jones's sequencing establishes a staccato, pulsating rhythm whose intense opticality temporarily obscures the medical context in which the images exist. As in the paintings, what emerges instead is the disconcerting power of focused, interpersonal emotional connection infused with encompassing historical perspective.

The exhibition's title, which refers to the astrological symbolism of the Saturn cycle, offers a ribald take on this kind of connection. The well-known first Saturn return takes place when people in their late 20s, but the second one, which people undergo in the years leading up to 60, also carries with it the potential for reckonings and stormy personal rebirth. As Jones enters this new act in his career and Saturn comes again, his penchant for far-reaching aesthetic play has enabled him to engage his passions for research and formal recontextualization, and to bring new generative spark to a body of work without parallel in contemporary art.

William E. Jones (b. 1962, Canton, Ohio) has been the subject of many solo exhibitions and retrospectives at institutions including Gund Gallery at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio (2023); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2015); Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri (2013); Austrian Film Museum, Vienna (2011); Anthology Film Archives, New York (2010); and ar/ge kunst Galerie Museum, Bolzano, Italy (2009). His work is in the public collections of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne, Australia; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of

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Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Saint Louis Art Museum; and Tate, London, among other museums. Recent and notable group exhibitions include Queering the Narrative, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, Germany (2022); Histories of our Time, Kunsthaus Baselland, Basel, Switzerland (2019); FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, Ohio (2018); Ordinary Pictures, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2016); and the Whitney Biennial 1993 and 2008, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. His latest novel, I Should Have Known Better, was published in 2021. He is also the author of True Homosexual Experiences: Boyd McDonald and Straight to Hell, Halsted Plays Himself, and I'm Open to Anything. Jones lives and works in Los Angeles.