

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

PRESS RELEASE

Josh Smith
Studio News

May 24 – July 20, 2024

Opening on Thursday, May 23, 2024, 6 – 9 pm

Artist talk with Josh Smith and Michelle Cotton, Director Kunsthalle Wien, 6 pm
Lichtenfelsgasse 5, A-1010 Vienna

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Studio News*, the gallery's sixth solo exhibition with the US-American artist Josh Smith.

In 2019, just before the dawn of COVID, Smith was interviewed by Ross Simonini for *ArtReview* in his studio warehouse in New York City, a multi-level live-work space and library with a lettuce garden in the basement.

Since the pandemic, Smith has emerged transformed as a new public persona. On Instagram, his presence suggests that he is an art-world ambassador, and on YouTube he hosts an ongoing lo-fi series called *Studio News*, in which he discusses his artistic pursuits and sometimes nothing at all. It is 'straight man' comedy, sprinkled with revelations about his inner life, all mixed up. It is the kind of unblinking deadpan that often looks back at you from Smith's paintings: a sincere satire.

On the occasion of his new show *Studio News* at Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Vienna, Smith asked Simonini to do a second interview to follow up on their initial conversation and respond to its heavy, introspective tone.

Ross Simonini Did you want to do a revised interview because your personality has changed since our first talk?

Josh Smith Yes, I was in a dark place at that time, but not so much anymore.

RS I feel like I can see that with your new use of Instagram and YouTube.

JS It's all been positive. I've met a lot of people, exposed myself to new opportunities, and have been able to play around with how people see me.

RS Would you say that you post things for other people or yourself?

JS Well both. It's for anyone. I like archiving little things. I like the way the grid looks. How the platforms preserve the content. Often times I post things that I know people won't particularly like. People want art but that's not always what I can give. I want human stuff as well. I think of it all as an art project. It's a new

medium for me. It's the same way I think about my paintings. I'm excited about YouTube now.

RS You have a program called *Studio News*, which is sort of an ironic title.

JS Because nothing happens in the studio.

RS There is no news.

JS Never.

RS Do you enjoy being a public persona now?

JS Fortunately, not too public. It makes me self-conscious but I like that feeling. Making art makes me feel self-conscious too.

RS Showing or making?

JS Making. In the studio I have anxiety about changing. I get turned off by the idea of doing the same thing over and over again. But it's nerve wracking to change... You do that too, change what you make.

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RS I do. It's tricky. People want you to stay the same, like a brand.

JS If you want to change you have to lean into it. You have to hammer it hard. I don't want to be an artist who makes the same thing over and over and this body of work illustrates another change.

RS They feel new to me in many ways. Your images seem to dance across the canvas now. How do they feel new to you?

JS I'm taking away the figure, ground relationship, the background and foreground. It's all over. The stencils negate the expressionist qualities. I worked and hoped for this.

RS But you are making the stencils.

JS Yes, I cut them. I make them myself.

RS Do you think about the word "pop"?

JS Yes, sometimes. Most art is pop art now. It's the kind of time we are in. Things are all on social media, which is pop. I want to make pop art, but I don't want to do Warhol.

RS The last show was all red paintings.

JS Red is repulsive. It's also alluring. During that time red was everywhere in my studio. And I left the stencils out of that show intentionally. It's a power color, but I did it. Now I'm pushing against that. That's what I do. Often, I am reacting against the past show or reacting to anything. This helps make my work feel alive.

RS When did you make these paintings?

JS I made these in the late fall, early winter... But I don't understand what they mean.

RS I'd never ask you that.

JS I know you wouldn't. I think they are somewhat self-portraits. They are collections of things around me. Collections. That could be a good title. That gives it value, or a way for them to connect.

RS It's like you're building a vocabulary and then constructing sentences.

JS It's exactly that. That's what I did. I used my vocabulary to make sentences.

RS They're simple, archetypal images. Most people have a relationship to these things.

JS The ladder is something I painted in college because it's neutral. And I love the eagle, the rope...all of it.

RS Do you see this vocabulary as Halloween-y?

RS My work does get Halloween-y sometimes. It's what seems to happen. Maybe it is a search for an inner child. Not being such an adult about things.

JS Do you plan your paintings?

RS Not right now. A lot of times I don't. I only want to paint. The stencils allow me to relish in that idea. When I would start these, I had the ingredients, but I didn't know what I was making. This was a new way to work. I hope the viewer can clearly tell how the paintings were constructed.

RS That seems generous, to allow people into the process. Do you think these paintings document the change in your personality?

JS I hadn't thought of it but the work is much more buoyant. It's less heavy, especially compared to red paintings. Those felt menacing, toward me. These feel more open-ended. I try to make all my paintings open-ended. I come up with an idea and make it function. A lot of my ideas are terrible. Starting with a terrible idea is something that I find challenging. I appreciate the challenge. Maybe terrible is too harsh of a word, but I like working uphill.

RS What percentage of your work makes it to exhibitions?

JS It depends on what's going on. On average, 50% of things that I start. I try different things out. I start in the dark and end in the light.

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RS Is it important that your paintings express how you feel?

JS Yes. Ultimately, it's about how honest I am with myself. For the most part, I am an expressionist. Whether I like it or not. But I don't think many people will see the paintings like that. I hope people put their own feelings into a painting, rather than think of me.

Ross Simonini is an artist, writer and composer living in Los Angeles.

Josh Smith was born in 1976 in Okinawa, Japan (his father was in the military) and, after a number of relocations, grew up mostly in eastern Tennessee, US. He has lived in New York since 1998. He has had several solo exhibitions in the United States and abroad at institutions including Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, DE (2016); Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Rome, IT (2015); The Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT, US (2011); Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva, CH (2009); De Hallen Haarlem, Haarlem, NL (2009); and MUMOK, Vienna, AT (2008). Recent group exhibitions include institutions such as de la Cruz Collection, Miami, FL, US (2023); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, NO (2023); Museum Brandhorst, Munich, DE (2019); Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, US (2014); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, US (2012); Venice Biennale, Venice, IT (2011); and New Museum, New York, NY, US (2009).

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