

de boer

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FRIEZE

BRAD PHILLIP'S CINEMATIC MYTH-MAKING

BY GRACIE HADLAND | JANUARY, 24 2023

'I Know What I Did Last Summer', the title of Brad Phillips's latest exhibition, suggests the opposite. It sounds like overcompensation, as if Phillips is reassuring himself of the strength of his memory, while alluding to its unreliability and the desire we sometimes have to revisit documentation to probe for truths we missed.



Brad Phillips, *Cristine in the Window*, 2022, oil on canvas, 61 × 51 cm.

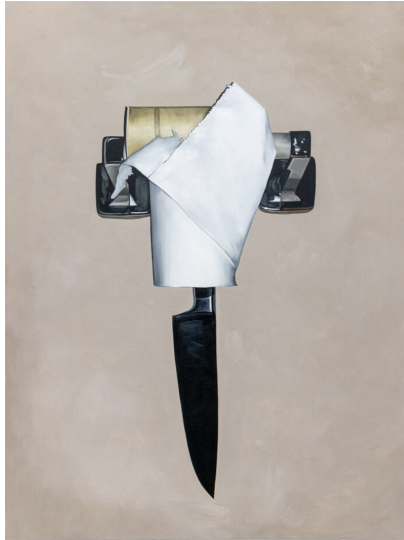
At de Boer gallery, many of Phillips's realistic paintings are created from photographic source material. His photogenic wife, the artist Cristine Brache, is the subject of a number of these works, in real and imagined spaces. One painting, *Cristine in the Window* (all works 2022), depicts her semi-silhouetted from behind, stretching to part the curtains to reveal the verdant foliage outside. Another, *Detroit Masterpiece*, shows her in profile with a spotlight illuminating her face and upper torso. In their drama and lighting, the images - like the exhibition title, which references the '90s slasher film *I Know What You Did Last Summer* - recall cinema or theatre.

When these paintings are viewed on a phone, whether in shots of the opening circulated online, or on Phillips's Instagram feed, their photorealism takes on an even more uncanny quality: they are photos of paintings of photos. Muddled with pixels and flattened by the screen, the viewer is further distant from the paintings' materiality. Some of the source photographs are also viewable on Phillips's Instagram, meaning an interested viewer can track the alterations the artist makes in paint. In *Hollywood Masterpiece*, for instance, a figure wearing sunglasses looks slightly upward, the iconic Hollywood sign reflected in their lenses. But in the post, there's no mirrored sign.

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For Phillips, who has a large online following, the strangeness of Instagram and the particular type of attention it generates intertwines with its function as a marketplace. Phillips told Brad Listi on his podcast, 'Otherpppl', that he often sells paintings through the platform, and feels that he can't delete it until he makes enough money. At the same time, his usage of the app seems to me to be aligned with his interest in the ways we construct self and truth.



Brad Phillips, *Brian De Palma's Bathroom*, 2022, oil on canvas. 122 × 91 cm.

The composition of *Brian De Palma's Bathroom*, a strange painting, conflates multiple orientations. A toilet paper holder is seen from slightly below, a sheet of paper curling impossibly upward to obscure the mechanism by which the cardboard tube is affixed to the roll, which itself somehow holds a downward-pointing knife. The banal objects in the three 'De Palma' paintings - toilet paper, door knob and high-heeled pump - linger at the edge of imminent violence: the knife is about to drop; the intruder, having smashed through the wooden door, is about to enter; the wearer of the high heel might be lying behind the door it props open. Their titles reference filmmaker Brian de Palma, one of the 'New Hollywood' generation of directors who asserted their role as authors rather than technicians. And yet Phillips denies the viewer the satisfaction of narrative: the moments are still, isolated and seemingly arbitrary, detached from a larger world.

Phillips manages to push his style of realism into uncanniness by juxtaposing the ordinary with the bizarre, suggesting that the two are not so distant: in intertwining the true and the feigned he creates a body of work that is one, both and neither. When the gallery assistant gave me the elevator pitch, he mentioned Phillips's habit (or compulsion) of creating fabrications, relaying an anecdote about a recent visitor who commented on Phillips's career as a professional basketball player. (He has never been a professional basketball player.) Phillips's myth-making in both work and life seems to be borne out of an attempt to destabilize the notion of the self, of reality: to challenge the things we remember, or believe in.

'Brad Phillips: I Know What I Did Last Summer' is on view at de boer, Los Angeles, until 25 February.

<https://www.frieze.com/article/brad-phillips-i-know-what-i-did-last-summer-2022-review>