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# MICHAEL ST. JOHN

## THE PASSIONS

18 September - 6 November 2021

(Los Angeles, CA) **de boer gallery** is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of new paintings by **Michael St. John** entitled *The Passions*. These paintings find their source imagery from identities of selected filmic characters and are all painted in grisaille—a method of painting in monochromatic grayscale. Focusing on the slippage that can occur between actors and their characters, St. John's portraits are predicated on the ever-so-slight prick or break in an otherwise seamless image. A catalog, with an essay by art historian Robert Hobbs will accompany the exhibition.

St. John's *The Passions* are inspired by Charles Le Brun's engravings of expressive heads, which illuminated ideas articulated in his 1668 lecture "Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière" which aimed to represent human emotions nobly. In St. John's paintings, he confronts the subject of mass-media figures in his painted portraits in order to reveal breaks in their cinematic facades, disclosing hints of a more profound reality.

In one painting, St. John finds Gwyneth Paltrow's Margot Tenenbaum (from *The Royal Tenenbaums*) particularly evocative because of her ability to switch roles from performer to observer. Thus, his portrait depicts a fictional character, who also serves as a surrogate viewer. In *The Passions*, St. John has generated conditions for punctum by amplifying the number of roles some of his sitters have undertaken.

More straightforward, is a painting of the business card of Patrick Bateman, the superficial rich yuppie investment banker in *American Psycho*. St. John's predilection for metonymic connections is playfully implemented in works that also reference familiar art world tactics. St. John's painting of Gloria Wandrous's lipstick-written message "No Sale" in *BUTterfield 8* can be construed ironically to refer to both this character, who ultimately sells herself, and St. John's continued use of the text in paintings over the past decade.

Painted at times in sharp photorealistic detail, along with pronounced brushwork, sometimes within the same work allows each painting an overarching abstractness and for the portraits to differ significantly, creating tension and distance. Removed from fandom's slavish idolization of fictionalized personalities, the work serves as the basis for layered meanings in which extrinsic facts either work in tandem with the fictive character he is portraying or to challenge it.

The main entrance of the exhibition will include a text-based floor installation by Mark Verabioff, titled, *ANOTHER SUNNY&SINISTER 89 DEGREES IN LA, 2021*.

### ABOUT MICHAEL ST. JOHN

Michael St. John's work conveys a sustained commitment to observing and re-presenting experiences of the everyday. Confronting the failed promise of the American Dream and the divide between fame and anonymity, St. John gathers source materials by casting an inclusive and penetrating gaze on the world through which he moves. Underlying this recalibration of the growing circuit of visual information is an insightful and rigorous formal practice informed by Rauschenberg, Warhol, Ashcan School artists, and 19th-century American trompe l'oeil painting. With a dedication to recognize and commemorate the time we live in, St. John's work reflects on notions of violence, tragedy, narcissism, racism, and indifference, drawing stimulating connections that kindle new and compassionate perspectives on contemporary culture.

St. John has shown his work extensively over the past thirty years in museums, alternative spaces and galleries throughout the United States. He has presented solo exhibitions at de boer, Los Angeles, CA; Andrea Rosen Gallery New York, NY; team (gallery, inc.), New York, NY; Karma, New York, NY; Edward Cella, Los Angeles, CA;

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Ashes/Ashes, New York, NY; and Marvelli Gallery, New York, NY. Group exhibitions include Marlborough Contemporary, New York, NY; CCS Bard/Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; The Rubell Family Collection/Contemporary Arts Foundation, Miami, FL; Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY; Rental Gallery, New York, NY; Greene Naftali, New York, NY; Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC; and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY. His work has been featured in The New York Times, Artnet, Art in America, Artnews, BOMB Magazine, W Magazine, and Cultured Magazine. St. John's paintings are held in numerous public collections, including The Rubell Family Collection, Weatherspoon Art Museum, MIT List Visual Arts Center, The Tang Teaching Museum, and the Zabłudowicz Collection.

**ABOUT ROBERT HOBBS**

Author of over 50 books and major catalogues, Robert Hobbs specializes in twentieth- and twenty-first century art. He has served as associate professor of art history at Cornell University, long-term visiting professor at Yale University, and has held the Rhoda Thalheimer Endowed Chair of American Art at Virginia Commonwealth University. He was appointed U.S. Commissioner for the Venice Biennale for his exhibition "Robert Smithson, Sculpture," which had previously been shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and for the Sao Paulo Biennale where he curated *Kara Walker: Slavery! Slavery!*

**ABOUT MARK VERABIOFF**

Mark Verabioff was born in Kingston, Canada in 1963. He has been living and working in Los Angeles since 2001. Prior to his move to Los Angeles, Verabioff lived in New York City where he regularly performed guerrilla art actions and screened single-channel videotapes in museums and not-for-profits throughout the city. He was featured in the 2016 iteration of the Hammer Museum's Biennial exhibition: *Made In L.A.: a, the, though, only*. In addition to this, Verabioff has had solo exhibitions at team (gallery, inc.) New York, NY; M. LeBlanc, Chicago, IL; Art Cologne, Cologne, DE; Private Places, Portland, OR; 356 S. Mission Rd., Los Angeles, CA; and Night Gallery, Los Angeles, CA. His performances and work have also been included in exhibitions at O-Town House, Los Angeles, CA; ASHES/ASHES, New York, NY; Fierman Gallery, New York, NY; epoch.gallery ; Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver, BC; François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; The New Museum, New York, NY; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Artists Space, New York, NY; and The Kitchen, NY. His work is included in the public collections of the Hammer Museum, The Oakland Museum of California, Eileen Harris Norton Foundation, LUX Collection (London, UK), Moderna Galerija, Museum of Modern Art (Slovenia), and Centre for Art Tapes (Canada), among others.

Image: Michael St. John, *Roslyn Taber*, 2021, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in. 76.2 x 61 cm.  
Photo Credit: Jacob Phillip

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