



BENJAMIN SPIERS

SPELLBOUND

Opening Reception: Friday, March 15th, 6pm - 9pm
March 15th - April 4th, 2019
807 S. Los Angeles Street, Los Angeles CA 9001433

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I have a guzzler's appetite for the visual
- Benjamin Spiers

Avenue des Arts is pleased to present *Spellbound*, an exhibition of new paintings by Benjamin Spiers.

Confidently jumping between figuration and abstraction, Spiers' paintings are full of 'secret details' which reveal themselves only after prolonged viewing. The suggestive light, the skillful rendition of figurative elements, the sophisticated textures, the careful choice of subdued hues, the unexpected yet harmonious compositions, are some of the elements that instantly grab viewer's attention before quieter, more obscure aspects of the artist's

personality start to unfurl. *"Lots of old master paintings have this,"* Spiers says about the way he connects with art, *"I get that same thing, but in very different ways, from Mondrian paintings, it's in De Kooning, in Monet, in John Currin, in Piero Della Francesca and on and on."* Much as contemplation of the classics and masters reveals a hidden world of thoughtfulness and complexity in the paint, the depth of Spiers' work becomes evident as the viewer's relationship with the painting gets more involved and sophisticated.

The connection to classical painters, their polished techniques and iconic imagery can be seen in a couple of works that will be included in the showcase. *Freckles* (2018) and *Black Seat* (2018) are clearly influenced by Picasso, but both are radically altered, through obsessive attention to skin texture and the introduction of realist elements such as a mirror in an ornate gold frame. Less evident, the abstract painting *Puppy* (2018), represents a distant cousin to Goya's painting *The Dog*. Unlike Goya's epically searching canine, *Puppy's* seeking seems devoid of energy as he literally drips while standing on one spot. Appearing numb and lifeless against endlessly blank surroundings, as if waiting for the dog equivalent of Godot, he still just about manages to look upwards. A couple of other paintings in the show, such as *Pierced Form* (2016), or *Crumb Bum* (2017), are examples of his figurative images rendered in a slightly surreal way. Clearly representational at first sight, these pieces conceal a series of impossibilities embodied through the image. Focused on exploring depictions of power and vulnerability, the juxtaposition of realistic and surrealist elements creates great complexity between the aesthetic strength and ambiguous emotional content.

Strongly leaning on intuition and believing in the power of the unconscious to make meaningful choices, Spiers says that *"a certain combination of bodily-ness, awkwardness, rawness, unconventional beauty, sexiness, complexity, power, ambiguity, stylisation, open-endedness, and dynamism"*, is the key element when picking a subject to work with. No matter if working from a Picasso drawing, an ancient Roman statue, or an abstract drawing of his own design, the performance of painting becomes Spiers' expression of himself - his uniqueness...

The subject matter is almost reduced to a gateway that opens up a space for the 'performance of painting'. *"Not slippery, gestural performance like Pollack, more a highly intense, laser-focused slow dance with the paint,"* Spiers describes his practice on a technical level, and adds, *"I need to look at something that I'm going to work from and feel excited by how I can develop it, twist, corrupt, and coerce it into something that talks about my deep-seated feelings about what it is to be alive and looking at the world with an overpowering visual greed."*

Benjamin Spiers was born in Cornwall and studied at Goldsmith's in the 1990s, where he was much affected by his tutor, Peter Doig, who encouraged him in the view that painting could be complex and mysterious. He has exhibited in numerous group shows, notably: *The Future Can Wait and The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* at Charlie Smith Gallery; *Beyond The Human Clay* at James Hyman Gallery; *Yesteryear, Nowadays* at Hales Gallery; and *Please Disturb Me* at the Great Eastern Hotel. He had a solo exhibition at James Colman Fine Art in 2004, James Hyman Gallery in 2011, and a British Council supported exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts, Puebla, Mexico in 2008. He has been selected for the John Moore's painting prize at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool and was a finalist in the 6th Manifest International Painting Award.

-Written by Sasha Bogojev

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