

Joshua Hagler Explores Fading Dichotomies in New Unit London Exhibition



Photo: P C Robinson © Artlyst 2019

Unit London is presenting Chimera, an exhibition of new, large-scale oil paintings by the American contemporary artist Joshua Hagler. The show comprises semi-abstract paintings, some of which utilise his delicate scraping technique using a scalpel to peel away layers of paint.

In his latest body of work, Hagler addresses a range of contemporary societal issues, drawing in part from his experience growing up in Middle America throughout the Eighties and Nineties. This informed his preoccupation with topics such as evangelical religion, conflict and fading dichotomies such as right-wing/left-wing, hero/villain and good or evil. Joshua Hagler works in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, installation, photography and digital animation.

'violence of the mind', which he defines as any act of imposing a narrative on an individual to create an enemy or scapegoat. He regards this culture of mob morality as a violent act, whether that person is guilty or not. In works here, such as his portrait of Michael Jackson, he encourages us to consider the widespread hunger for hero and villain archetypes and its inherent hypocrisy.

The title of the exhibition, Chimera, originates from Greek mythology and describes a beast with the head of a lion, body of a goat and the tail of a serpent. It has come to mean something that is hoped for but is impossible to achieve. With their hints of figuration, the semi-abstract compositions in Chimera are also hybrid creations that convey a sense of the unobtainable. They appear as an excavation of time: layers of figures and historic scenes, distorted by marks, smears, cuts and puddles that allude to fading or distorted memories.

Hagler's art historical references include painting techniques found in obscure Italian religious art as well as the sociological and psychologically charged paintings of German Expressionism and New Objectivity. In The Call and the Called Out (The Dogs Grow Larger), Hagler directly references Max Beckmann whose work rose from the rise of extremism and political upheaval of the early Twentieth Century and which Hagler recalls here and connects with the era of #MeToo, Trumpism and uber-capitalism.

Joshua Hagler was born in Mountain Town, Idaho in 1979 and spent his formative years living between rural Illinois and Arizona. Hagler graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Arizona in Tucson in 2002 and currently works and resides alongside his partner Maja Ruznic, a fellow contemporary painter, in Los Angeles, California. Since 2006, Hagler has exhibited at both group and solo shows in galleries and museums across North and South America, Europe and Australia. In the summer of 2017, he was awarded a place on MICA's Alfred and Tra ord Klots Program for Artists in Brittany, France and undertook a year-long Roswell Artist in Residence Program in New Mexico. The Brand Library chose his project proposal for large-scale installation and exhibition, and Art Center in Los Angeles debuted in the summer of 2018.

Hagler was one of the featured artists in Unit London's 2018 group show 'Looking For U', an exhibition that explored themes of identity and communication in the modern age.

Unit London remains firmly committed to its core principles that art should be celebrated, inclusive and undivided. Founded in 2013, Unit London was born from an innate desire to break down the barriers of elitism and create new innovative pathways into the contemporary art world, recognised for its pioneering approach to digital media and role in expanding and diversifying audiences using new technologies.