

THE ARTIST ROOM

THE MALE GAZE: FROM LARRY STANTON TO NOW

5 – 30 July 2022

Private View: Tuesday 5 July, 6–8pm

Opening times: Wednesday–Friday, 11am–6pm and Saturday, 12–4pm

Portraiture is an instinct...

David Hockney, 1986

The Artist Room is pleased to present *The Male Gaze From Larry Stanton to Now*, a group exhibition featuring works by Kenneth Bergfeld, Jimmy DeSana, Cary Kwok, Paul P., Leon Pozniakow, Larry Stanton and David Weishaar.

Departing from the practice of Stanton, this exhibition explores the male-on-male gaze through the lens of an intergenerational group of emerging and established artists from Europe and the United States. To coincide with the exhibition, The Artist Room has commissioned Sam Moore –author of *All my teachers died of AIDS* and contributor to *Frieze*, *Hyperallergic* and *i-D* – to publish an accompanying essay.

Larry Stanton (1947–1984, New York, USA) was a New York-based artist who through intimate and colourful portraiture documented bohemian life in the city and beyond from the '60s–80s. A gay man, Stanton's works such as *Untitled* (1981) and *Untitled* (n.d.) captured the essence of the radical and liberating post-Stonewall and pre-AIDS queer scene. He would draw, sketch and paint figures – often seeking to capture beauty, personality and sensuality through detailed observation of their distinctive facial features – in locations from Fire Island to Los Angeles.

Explaining Stanton's careful and intuitive approach toward portraiture, David Hockney, a contemporary and friend whom Stanton visited in London in the '70s, said 'People make their *own* faces and Larry knew this instinctively.' An important work, *Untitled* (1978), depicts a patient at the St Vincent Alcohol Rehab Centre, a clinic Stanton himself attended for psychiatric treatment. Around this period, Stanton was ingratiated with artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, and curatorial figures such as Henry Geldhazer during his tenure at the Metropolitan Museum. His work was also show at prominent galleries including MoMA PS1 and Holly Solomon.

In 1984, Stanton died from AIDS-related complications at just 37 years old as the virus devastatingly swept through the United States; particularly affecting the LGBT community. Since then, his estate has been under the custodianship of Arthur Lambert, a photographer and the artist's long-term partner. While lesser-known than contemporaries such as Patrick Angus, Hockney, Peter Hujar and Andy Warhol, Stanton's genre-defining and distinctive approach to figuration is beginning to be re-discovered through

exhibitions in the United States and Europe. Organised in close collaboration with Stanton's estate, this will be the first exhibition of Stanton's work in the United Kingdom. Focusing on the powerful nature of the male-on-male gaze to convey qualities of introspection, kinship and desire, this show includes diverse works from the '80s to the present.

Kenneth Bergfeld's (b.1990) painting *A home with no hands IX* (2019) continues his investigation to understand how we can view ourselves through the eyes of others. Depicting an partially-hidden figure merging into a hallucinogenic background, Oriane Durand has described such characters – that he has named 'avatars' – as 'mystified beings... [that] move between the interior and exterior, revealed without revealing themselves.' Similarly, Jimmy DeSana (b.1949, Atlanta, USA; d.1990, New York, USA) is known for his approach to photography that treats the body as an object. William Burroughs described his subject matter as ranging from 'savagely explicit to purely symbolic.' *Smoke Cowboy* (1985) depicts a lone cowboy – a figure often fetishised – shielded by the brim of his hat and staring directly at the viewer.

Incorporating sculpture, painting and installation Leon Pozniakow's (b.1982, Bath, UK) practice draws from personal memories to render sensitive explorations of gay experience and love. His paintings *Querelle* and *Nono* (both 2021) depict characters adapted from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's arthouse film *Querelle* (1982) inspired by Jean Genet's novel *Querelle of Brest* (1947). Differently, David Weishaar's (b.1987 Hagenau, France) paintings depict friends of the artist, often placed situated amongst imagined backgrounds and with characteristically luminescent eyes. Appearing like 'modern vampires', Elsa Meunier notes how Weishaar seeks to implicitly indicate the 'intolerance and rejection that queer people still face today.'

Cary Kwok (b.1975, Hong Kong) is known for his exquisitely detailed drawings utilising a graphic novel-like aesthetic style to portray erotic – sometimes fetishistic – scenes. Produced for this show, *Beguiled* (2022) invites viewers to become a voyeur onto a solitary figure lighting a hidden cigarette at night. Similarly, Paul P.'s (b.1977, Canada) *Untitled* (2008) depicts two figures reclining and smoking. Often working from imagery sourced from gay erotica magazines, P. seeks to capture the raw and fleeting beauty of youth. Writing on the artist's veiled language exploring male desire, Alex Bennett observes how P. 'manifests a knowing subject of misty and ethereal lustre.'

By bringing Stanton's works – for the first time – into a close conversation with a radical group of contemporary artists, the included drawings and paintings can be understood as a celebration of freedom; the tender beauty found in fleeting and unexpected encounters; and the powerful, constantly imaginative and world-building qualities of portraiture. As Dr Julia Mayo, Chief of Psychiatric Care at St Vincent's Hospital where Stanton was treated observed, 'Nothing dies that is remembered.'

With thanks to Fabio Cherstich and Arthur Lambert from the Larry Stanton Estate.

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