Press Release

JAMES KELLY | CONTEMPORARY

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JACK BALAS

Guy’d Book

Opening reception for the artist: Friday, October 30, 2015, 5:00 - 7:00 PM
(Please note that the reception takes place in the middle of the show’s run)

Exhibition dates: October 16 - November 21, 2015
Contact: Stephen Husbands: stephen@jameskelly.com
James Kelly Contemporary is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new paintings by Jack Balas. This will be the gallery’s first exhibition with Balas.

When Jack Balas first began painting back in the 1980s, he was swept away primarily by landscape, and western landscape at that. A Chicago native who had, growing up, spent time on vacations in Colorado where he fell in love with mountain vistas, he moved after college to Los Angeles and found himself with a job as a cross-country art-shipper, driving a month-on, month-off, route between California and New York that brought him, almost every time, through Santa Fe. “The first time I had some real time here was 4 days before Thanksgiving in 1982, staying in a $15 top-floor cubbyhole at the DeVargas Hotel (now the St. Francis), wandering the city and falling in love with the mud walls and piñon smoke and the landscape galleries and especially, later, O’Keeffe, despite my MFA in sculpture and big-time exposure to Chicago’s “Monster Roster” transgressive painters,” says the artist. Since those days he has not missed a year without a visit to Santa Fe, and since those days the paintings have taken on the feel of maps, annotated as they are with numbers and texts, even entire brief stories. The photography that he has also worked on since, as well as the stories appearing on some of the work, emanated from the travel aspect of the trucking job, as they were ways to remain an artist while earning a living doing something completely different.

Fast-forward to 2015 and, looking around the exhibition, you notice a heavy emphasis on the painted depictions of athletic youngish men. These men are his current muse, offered as an almost political counterpoint to our society’s habit of and indulgence with female imagery. But, the artist contends, the men are presented as Everyman, variable, philosophical, vulnerable, flexible and eager to please. Beginning with a photo series eventually titled STUD DUST, its denizens took over the painted spaces after Balas spent a year on the faculty at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where among other duties he was teaching figure drawing classes. That experience not only was a springboard to the figurative painting in the exhibition here, it also allowed the flowering of TATTOO DETOUR, a series of drawings of surfers and their ilk begun in 2007 and enacted on annual visits to the beaches and Starbucks of Waikiki, Honolulu.

Within the current exhibition is a subset of paintings titled MUSE / MUSEUM. A daily pleasure for Balas is his own surfing through his library of art catalogs and monthly magazines such as Artforum and Art In America. But over the years not only did he find himself trying to “see” his name in the ads therein, he also become overly aware of what he characterizes as an extreme gender imbalance, favoring, as mentioned, female imagery over male. Thus began the painting series (which now also includes work in photo), whereby he is planting his own images of young men within hand-drawn advertising layouts appropriated from the magazine spreads. Starting out as a critique of certain artists who may or may not be known for plying female imagery, the series has modified into a tribute of sorts to the many artists whom, he says, he’s been carrying around in his head for years. Exceptional among the series, and cogent to Santa Feans, are LYnda Benglis FOREVER, based, of course, on Benglis’s infamous ad appearing in the November 1974 issue of Artforum, and Bruce Nauman: SIXPACT, inspired by Nauman’s pyramid of animals and displayed on the lawn of the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa. (“If I could own any one sculpture in the world, that would be it,” says Balas.) Of course there is the O’Keeffe collage too, SKY ABOVE CLOUDS, but this piece is from a subset within
the subset, that being a number of works referencing the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, whose halls Balas wandered growing up in that city.

Within all of the work on display (as well as elsewhere), Balas says that, given the image glut we are all inundated with every day, his goal is an interesting image, a memorable one, even (considering the language to be found), a transcendent one.

A 150-page catalog, GUY’D BOOK,” accompanies the exhibition, covering painting, photo, drawing, sculpture and writing.

Balas is a 1995 recipient of an Individual Fellowship in Painting from the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C.

His most recent museum solo was “We’ll Be Seeing You,” in 2008 at the Museum of Contemporary Art In Denver. He is currently part of a group exhibition organized by the United States Department of State, Art in Embassies Program, in the United States Embassy in Vienna, Austria.

His work is in the permanent collections of (among others):

- Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, New York.
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Logan Collection, San Francisco, CA.
- Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado.
- Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- University of Maine Art Museum, Bangor, Maine.
- University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Based in Colorado, Jack Balas will be present at a reception held mid-show, 5-7pm on Friday, October 30th. At that point, and with some luck, the artist hopes to have along a suite of drawings begun several years ago and based on the sculptures to be found along Santa Fe’s Canyon Road, titled ON CANYON ROAD.