

PRESSBOOK

Hernan BAS

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Decorative Histories

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Perrotin Tokyo offer a new exhibition of recent paintings by the American artist Hernan Bas, a figure who has exhibited widely and has work in many prestigious private collections including MoMA, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Rubell Family Collection, Miami. Bas delves into his latest series, offering context and engagement with a wider visual vocabulary.

A: This is the first display your work at Perrotin Tokyo. How has it been working with the space, and how will the paintings be displayed?

HB: It's a very smart, simply designed space so I kept the installation quite traditional, a regular painting show in the classical sense.

A: How do the works on show resonate with your wider practice – how did you select the pieces and how do they relate to each other thematically or structurally?

HB: I tend to work on exhibitions in terms of series, this is no exception, this series is titled *Insects from Abroad*. Based on an entomology book published in 1874 titled *Insects Abroad: Being a popular account of foreign insects, their structure, habits, and transformations*. When I came across the book I found the poetics used to describe insects in this book parallel to the visual vocabulary used to describe the late 19th century European effeminate male character of "The Dandy."

Historically these characters were ridiculed, described as if they were actual insects, and given the appearance of an otherworldly species completely separate from mainstream society. The characters, whilst each representing an actual insect species are not painted in a literal manner, decorative fans stand in for wings, or longer than average limbs are incorporated to extend the illusion. The title also extends my desire to bring a group of these “insects” to Japan, on a literal tour abroad.

A: The paintings “fluctuate between past and present and between the pictorial convention of landscape and abstraction.” Why is this kind of fluctuation and fluidity important to you?

HB: I like to keep the paintings as timeless as possible, even in the styling of the figures – always simple, jeans, t-shirt, etc. allows the viewer to engage with whatever narrative they choose to read into the work. I try not to spell it out for the viewer; ambiguity is always a friend to the works, with the exception of the titles which I have a good deal of fun with. As for the elements of abstraction, that’s just the pleasurable part of making the work, the hard part is deciding *what* to paint, once I figure that out the physical act of the painting is easy and free which often results in abstract passages within the works.

A: What are your works inspired by?

HB: It varies from series to series, I tend to be drawn to great stories and somewhat obscure moments and places in history. The otherworldly and coded history of homosexuality are overall themes that unite the works in general.

A: Despite growing technologies, traditional methods such as painting are on the rise. As an artist working in this type of medium, why do you think it’s important to continue using these techniques and continuing to re-invent their relevance in the contemporary world?

HB: I like to paint, and as it’s never really dissipated within society, there has always been an audience that is drawn to the medium despite any new trend or technology. Painting has always existed just fine with its new neighbours: video, performance etc; if anything, they have helped way painters approach new ways of image-making.

A: Where do you find your subject matter?

HB: I am a very curious person and constantly looking for new material. Nothing beats an old book store and I usually find that when I find a crumb I it tends to lead to a whole body of work. It’s as though a spark goes off and I get rather obsessive about finding every avenue I can approach to a subject. The works in this exhibition for example, led me to research some of the most bizarre behaviours in insects that I had never been aware of.

A: What other projects do you have coming up in 2018?

HB: Gallery exhibitions in Hong Kong in the fall, and a survey of recent works at the CAC (Centro de Arte Contemporáneo in Malaga, Spain in May.

Hernan Bas: Insects from Abroad runs until 11 March. Find more information [here](#).

Credits:

1. #1_Hernan Bas Unlike other members of his species, camouflage is not in his favor, 2017 Acrylic on linen 127 x 101,6 cm / 50 x 40 in. Courtesy Perrotin Photo: Kei Okano.