

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

February 23, 2016

Alex Israel / Bret Easton Ellis

FEBRUARY 25 - APRIL 23, 2016

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 6-8PM

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

456 NORTH CAMDEN DRIVE, BEVERLY HILLS

www.gagosian.com

Gagosian Beverly Hills is pleased to present new collaborative paintings by Alex Israel and Bret Easton Ellis.

The city of Los Angeles is both background and subject in the respective oeuvres of Israel and Ellis. For Israel, the American dream, as embodied by the Los Angeles mythos, remains affecting and potent. Channeling celebrity culture as well as the slick appearance and aspirations of the entertainment capital, Israel approaches his hometown with an uncanny coupling of local familiarity and anthropological curiosity. His work alludes to both California cool and calculated brand creation, embracing clichés and styles that exude the hygienic optimism endemic to the local scene.

Ellis, a renowned Generation X author, became famous while still a college student for his first novel *Less Than Zero*, a portrait of amoral, decadent L.A. in the 1980s. Over the next decade, he elaborated his jaundiced vision of a superficial youth society with a cast of toxic recurring characters in *The Rules of Attraction*, the highly controversial *American Psycho*, and the satirically humorous *Glamorama*. *Lunar Park* (2005) provided a new twist where Ellis himself became the central character of his own plot. (Interestingly, Israel has described *Less than Zero* as “a readymade,” its text seemingly plucked straight out of life.)

Recently, Israel made his first foray into movie-making with *Baywatch* co-creator Michael Berk as screenwriter, resulting in a feature-length film *SPF 18*, which will premier later this year. Inspired and emboldened by the experience, he then approached Ellis to collaborate. The friendship between them spawned a lively ongoing discourse on their city of fantasy and possibility, leading to the current body of work. At Israel's provocation, Ellis wrote short texts. Then, Israel converted the selected texts into various fonts, resourced directly from the local landscape, and combined them with commercial stock images—sunsets, rolling surf, aerial views of the city and close-up details of its vernacular architecture—the rights to which he purchased online. The hyperfilmic results were adapted to the scale and medium of monumental paintings.

With their floating captions and outsized dimensions, the paintings resemble the opening credits of feature films and the billboards of the Sunset Strip. And yet, their material connection to painting is never relinquished—the canvas is brushed with a clear gel medium to imbue a sense of texture and palpability, before their processing through the inkjet printer. Taken together, the paintings evoke a slideshow of the city's subconscious; a surreal film pitch. Each of Ellis's captions suggests a larger narrative or overarching story, of which the viewer is given but a glimpse, for example: “The ghost resided in the guesthouse by the pool. At night it sometimes floated up the palm tree and drifted on its fronds, wondering if anyone cared,” and “I am going to be a very different kind of star.”

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The works were fabricated at Warner Brothers by the production crews formerly responsible for hand-painting Hollywood film backdrops, as well as Israel's earlier paintings. Now they, too, use the latest industrial techniques, and in doing so, sow the seeds of their own obsolescence. Alive to the irony of the situation, yet positively pragmatic, Israel has embraced this evolution in his own production methods.

This collaboration between Israel and Ellis, both natives of L.A., is no mere serendipity. The incisive sense of desire and brand recognition that they share make them among today's sharpest observers of the culture of pleasure, their art inseparable from the world in which it finds expression. The current exhibition shows artist and writer at their most subliminal, comingling art as entertainment and entertainment as art: a bold new step in their ongoing distillations of the city of angels.

This exhibition is the 2016 edition of Gagosian's Oscar show program; a highly anticipated annual fixture in the Los Angeles cultural calendar where the art, film, and celebrity communities join to celebrate the exhibition, immediately prior to the Academy Awards ceremony.

Alex Israel was born in Los Angeles in 1982, where he lives and works. Public collections include Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; The Broad, Los Angeles; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Recent solo exhibitions include "Sightings: Alex Israel," Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2015–16); "Alex Israel," Le Consortium, Dijon (2013); and "Alex Israel: Lens," LAXART, Los Angeles (2013). "Alex Israel at the Huntington" is currently on view at The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens through July 11th, and "Alex Israel" will be on show at Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, from June 2nd through September 11th, 2016.

Bret Easton Ellis was born in Los Angeles in 1964, where he lives and works. He published his first novel, *Less Than Zero*, in 1985. Several of his books have been made into films, including *The Rules of Attraction* (1987), *American Psycho* (1991), and *The Informers* (1995). Ellis has written, directed, produced, and acted in various feature-length and short films, and he hosts "The Bret Easton Ellis Podcast" weekly, interviewing figures across cultural disciplines. He writes for publications including *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *GRANTA*, and *The New York Times*.

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