

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



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Bob Dylan's Paintings Go On Display in New York

By Jon Friedman



Bob Dylan during the 22nd annual Bluesfest music festival near Byron Bay on April 25, 2011.

Bob Dylan is starring this month on a different kind of stage than his fans are accustomed to seeing him on. The tony Gagosian Gallery, on the Upper East side of Manhattan, will be displaying Dylan's work as an artist.

The showing, entitled "Bob Dylan: The Asia Series," will be featured from Sept. 20 to Oct. 22. This marks Dylan's first exhibition in New York, the city where he moved as an aspiring teenage folk singer in early 1961 and quickly made his mark as a groundbreaking folk singer. Dylan recorded such lauded albums as "Highway 61 Revisited," and "Blood on the Tracks" in the city.

The Asia Series is being billed as a visual journal of Dylan's travels in Japan, China, Vietnam and Korea and it characterizes his on-the scene depictions of people, street scenes, architecture and landscapes. The works can be easily identified by title and specific details, including "Mae Ling," "Cockfight," "The Bridge" and "Hunan Province." Other creations — "Big Brother" and "Opium," among them — have a greater cryptic quality.

Dylan has been a prolific painter dating back to the 1960s. He created the cover art for "Music From Big Pink," the first album released by his friends and frequent back-up group, The Band, in 1968. Dylan also did the cover for his own album, "Self Portrait," in 1970. Both works have a charming, playful, enduring quality.

In addition, Dylan attributes a good deal of the strength of his 1975 album "Blood on the Tracks" to the fact that he had studied painting with Norman Raeben, a New York City art teacher, before he wrote the songs for the album. "Reportedly inspired by the breakup of his marriage, the album derived more of its style from Dylan's renewed interest in painting," Cameron Crowe wrote in the liner notes to Dylan's 1985 "Biograph" collection of previously released and unreleased songs.

(Jon Friedman is currently writing a book about Dylan for Penguin Books)