

John Lees

Krazy Paradise

September 9 – October 28, 2023

Opening Reception: Saturday September 9th 4 – 6 PM

Old Mountebank, 2015; 2023, Oil and traces of white conté crayon, 25 x 14 inches

Betty Cuningham Gallery is pleased to present John Lees, *Krazy Paradise*, September 9th through October 28th. This is the artists seventh solo show with the gallery. A reception will be held on Saturday, September 9th, from 4 – 6 PM. An illustrated catalog and online viewing room will accompany the exhibition.

When choosing the spelling of the title for this exhibition, *Krazy Paradise*, John Lees echoes Marlena Dietrich's German accented voice from the song *Illusions* (performed in the film *Foreign Affair*). Regardless of the origin, Lees' *Krazy Paradise* moves us into his private universe with a laugh.

His paintings characteristically have a double meaning – one personal, one universal. From the beginning, although beginnings are long for Lees, he concentrated on the old stuffed chair, the quiet pond, the ripples, the footed bathtub, the hills, or his first home in Denville NJ. Basically monoliths, but monoliths we found familiar. Each monolith is endowed with memories (the artist's as well as our own). Portraits, often self-portraits, are always part of his focus. And whether landscape or bathtub or portrait, each would be worked and reworked, with dates on the back documenting each reentry.

Turning specifically to the 16 paintings and 7 drawings featured in *Krazy Paradise*, one cannot help but think that the more things change, the more they stay the same (Camus). In fact, several of these selected paintings are indeed pre-existing works, some greatly changed and others only slightly.

Now, feelings are more intense as the paint is freer and colors are high. In *Large Landscape* a miniscule figure is enveloped by grand hills. In *Profile* or *Man in an Armchair*, there is a new intensity to the color. Surfaces are sanded down and the delineation - sometimes vague as in *Old Mountebank* and other times more stylized as in *Cabeau* – revealing an unreal world with real feeling shared by the artist and his audience.

John Lees was born in 1943 in Denville, NJ. He received his BFA and MFA from the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, CA. He has been exhibiting in New York since 1977 and has been an instructor at the New York Studio School since 1988. Lees is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Hassam, Speicher, Betts, and Symons Purchase Fund Award; the Francis J. Greenburger Award; the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Grant; and the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant. His work can be found in a host of public institutions, most notably the Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI; the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA; The Kemper Collection, Kansas City, MO; the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; and The New Museum, New York, NY. He lives and works in upstate New York.

Listing Information: Betty Cuningham Gallery is located at 15 Rivington Street, b/t Bowery and Chrystie Street

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Public Transportation: F train to Second Ave, 6 Train to Spring Street, JZ Train to Bowery

Gallery Hours: Tues- Sat, 10am- 6pm