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Tony Bevan: Recent Paintings

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The exhibition focuses on Bevan's ongoing examination of the head through self-portraiture, and a new series of paintings that depict a solitary tree. Opens September 6 at L.A. Louver.



For over thirty years, Tony Bevan has made paintings and drawings in acrylic and charcoal, which have extended and expanded the tradition of expressive figure-based painting. Bevan uses his own image to explore his subjects, but transforms literal appearance by distilling line and form. The head is isolated: positioned either on a low horizon line or seeming to emerge from the bottom edge of the canvas. Bevan offsets each head with a range of dramatic backgrounds including unmodulated, flat color fields of red, blue or black; mottled fleshy tones; or a vigorous range of marks in what appears to be the residue of materials employed in the making of the head

itself. Contour lines appear ground into the surface of each head to imply musculature or veins, and convey expressive content. In a recent compositional development for the artist, several of the heads are encircled by an abstracted architectural superstructure.

The tree, as a subject for Bevan, stems from his extensive travels to China in 2007 and 2008. In China, Bevan visited the cave paintings of Dunhuang, Gansu Province, and the great Buddah at Leshan, both of which influenced his subsequent work. However it was an ancient tree that he discovered in the courtyard of a temple in the district of Dujiangyan, Sichuan Province, which has captivated Bevan's imagination for this new series. "What attracted me was the tree's contradictions and the endless forms that came from this—a bit like looking at clouds changing—I set out to explore its full nature, and the forms it held within." Included in this new series is the colossal *Tree, 2012*, which measures almost 8 x 11 feet, and is Bevan's largest painting to date of the subject. By reducing the tree to elemental architectural form on canvas, Bevan conveys its noble bearing and life force.

In all his work, Bevan limits his palette to a distinctive range of flaming reds and oranges, intense cobalt blue, dense blacks, and off-white, fleshy tones. He mixes raw pigment with acrylic, and uses thick chunks of charcoal that he applies directly onto canvas or paper, working first on the floor and then on the wall. Grainy residue and clumps of medium are dispersed throughout the works, which give them a visceral appearance, and demonstrate the intense physicality of their creation, while conveying complex and ambiguous emotional content.



Tony Bevan's paintings are concurrently on view in the exhibition *Messerschmidt and Modernity*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California, 24 July through 14 October, 2012.

Tony Bevan was born in Bradford, England, in 1951, and lives and works in London. He studied in London at the Bradford School of Art (1968-1971), Goldsmiths' College (1971-1974), and the Slade School of Fine Art (1974-1976). Since 1976, Bevan has exhibited in Europe, the United States and Asia. Significant solo museum exhibitions include the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK, 1987-88; Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, Munich, Germany, 1989; Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1993; Brandenburgische Kunstsammlungen, Cottbus, Germany, 1997; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 2003; Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Spain, 2005; and the National Portrait Gallery, London, 2011. Public collections include the British Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Royal Academy and the Tate, London; Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Germany; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark; Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm, Sweden; Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, New York; Yale University Art Gallery, Connecticut; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and Palm Springs Desert Museum, California.

In March 2007, Tony Bevan was elected a Royal Academician by the Royal Academy of Arts, London.



Images

Head, 2012, pigment and acrylic on canvas, 30 1/4 x 28 in. (76.8 x 71.1 cm), Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

Untitled (The Trees, Number 1), 2012, pigment and acrylic on canvas, 66 x 101 1/2 in. (167.6 x 257.8 cm), Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

Tree (no 2), 2012, pigment and acrylic on canvas, 94.1 x 130 in. (239 x 331 cm), Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA