

Hernan Bas *Cambridge Living*

Private View 6 – 8pm, Tuesday 5 September 2017

Exhibition 6 September – 21 October 2017

Victoria Miro Mayfair, 14 St George Street, London W1S 1FE



Image: *Suicide Sunday (taking on water)*, 2017
Acrylic and pigment on linen
153 x 183 cm, 60 x 72 in
© Hernan Bas, courtesy Victoria Miro

Victoria Miro is delighted to announce an exhibition of new paintings by US Detroit-based artist Hernan Bas inspired by the lore and romanticism of life at Cambridge.

Following a period of research while in residence at Jesus College Cambridge in 2016, Bas has developed new subject matter including the famed ‘Night Climbers of Cambridge’, a group of students whose nocturnal ascents of the ancient buildings of the university and town, taking photographs while trying to avoid detection, gained them a cult following during the early decades of the twentieth century. The notoriety of this thrill-seeking fraternity was cemented when an eponymous book, written under the pseudonym Whipplesnaith, was published by Chatto and Windus in 1937, featuring photographs of members perched atop steeples and squeezed between pillars without climbing ropes and often dressed in dapper evening attire.

An aura of camaraderie, transgression, eroticism and decadence permeates other works on display, which feature Cambridge societies such as the secretive Adonians, famed for their fabled dinners in which fellows and old boys invite the most attractive male undergraduates. Debauchery of a more inclusive and contemporary kind is witnessed in the artist’s depiction of Caesarian Sunday, the first of Cambridge’s summer drinking parties traditionally held on the Sunday of the May Bank Holiday weekend, and the notorious after-exams party Suicide Sunday, held in June, and its traditional cardboard boat race. In his depiction of this, Bas makes a gentle nod to Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa*, 1818-19, though allusions to classical themes and genres are always viewed through the prism of his interpretations as an observer and an outsider – whether trying to follow in the footsteps of Lord Byron, or portraying punters or freshers, terms unknown to the artist before his Cambridge sojourn.

Further imagery is derived from plant specimens gathered by Charles Darwin during his voyage on HMS Beagle, which Bas studied in person at the Cambridge University Herbarium. Darwin, who joined the Beagle's second voyage in 1831, developed his groundbreaking theories of evolution during the five-year expedition to South America, the Galapagos Islands and New Zealand, and sent around 2,400 plants to Cambridge as a gift to his friend and mentor Professor John S. Henslow. Examples of these provide both a verdant mis-en-scène and a backdrop of hard fact and scientific endeavour, against which legend and rumour, intrigue and gossip flourish.

Bas is as prodigious in his experimentation with painting materials and techniques as with his reference points and source material. Inspired by an exhibition of illuminated manuscripts at the Fitzwilliam Museum, which included a vitrine containing the pigments used to create them, he has recently begun to make his own paints, the results of which can be seen in these paintings on linen and painted works on paper.

Bas' practice has always been intrinsically linked to an exploration of history and literature and stems from the artist's interest in figuring historical and mythological narratives within the imagery and iconography of popular culture, fashion, queer culture and mysticism. With an increased focus on English subject matter, recent bodies of work have concentrated on the 'bright young things' of 1920s London and the Bloomsbury Group, whose male members, with the exception of Duncan Grant, were educated at Cambridge. An elaborate, career-long narrative weaving together cults, sects and secret societies, nihilistic romanticism, youthful abandon – and its flipside, introversion – is further enriched as Bas turns his attention to hothouse varsity life.

About the artist

Born in Miami, Florida, in 1978, Hernan Bas lives and works in Detroit, Michigan and Miami, Florida. He has held numerous solo institutional exhibitions around the world, including *Florida Living* at the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah (until 20 August 2017), *TIME*, *Hernan Bas: a queer and curious cabinet* at the Bass Museum of Art, Miami (2013), *The Other Side* at the Kunstverein Hannover (2012), *Hernan Bas: works from the Rubell Family Collection*, Miami (2007) and Brooklyn Museum of Art (2009), and has been included in a number of important group exhibitions, including *A Sum of its Parts*, at Polk Museum of Art (2016), *Tracing Shadows*, at PLATEAU, Samsung Museum of Art (2015), *Aquatopia, The Imaginary of the Ocean Deep*, at Nottingham Contemporary and Tate St. Ives (2013), *Nightfall*, MODEM Centre for Contemporary Art, Hungary, travelling to Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2012), *Nothing in the World But Youth*, Turner Contemporary, Margate (2011), Busan Biennale, Korea (2008), *Like Color in Pictures*, Aspen Art Museum (2007), *Ideal Worlds - New Romanticism in Contemporary Art*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2005), Whitney Biennial (2004), and The Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami (2002). His work was also included in *The Collectors*, curated by Elmgreen & Dragset at Nordic and Danish Pavilions, Venice Biennale (2009). In 2014, Rizzoli published a monograph on the artist, the most comprehensive book of his work to date. His work is included in the permanent collections of Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among others.

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