

Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix

PRESS RELEASE

Damian Le Bas

22 September- 16 November

Private view and opening reception: 21 September 6pm

Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix is pleased to announce the gallery's first exhibition of Damian Le Bas, a late British artist. The exhibition marks the gallery's representation of Le Bas's estate. It showcases a number of paintings on the gallery's ground floor, and map paintings and a globe on the lower floor.

While Le Bas continues to be regarded as one of the leading figures in the contemporary Traveller/Romani art scene, his art and its messages go far beyond these communities, and not only are they relevant in much wider context but increasingly so in the current world where we witness social and political upheavals across the world more than ever.

The cartography, or map drawing/painting is a group of signature works of Damian Le Bas. Multiple silhouettes of man with top hat, eyes open wide with eyelashes, wheels and horseshoes inhabit the space, which are territories of states or regions that the map in question is originally meant to represent. Yes, the Travellers are everywhere. And importantly, the body of work subverts the unquestioned notion that the world is made up with states, countries and local governments which occupy geographical territories. Le Bas's maps remind us that after all, the borders are artificial, and that Travellers have travelled across borders over many centuries. It is fitting that it is Damian Le Bas, a son of mixed heritage, who has populated the minutely created map of Europe or Britain with his alter-ego Gypsy fellowmen and the like, obfuscating all traces of man-made borders. As the artist said, "We are claiming this space for ourselves. we, the constrained, limited and defined by those who want to control, name and silence us. Here we are."

Works of Damian Le Bas are as complex as the man himself: his work is always imbued with a sense of humour that could solicit immediate and instinctive smile, but sometimes behind its joyous appearance lurks his somber, darker side of his worldview. On view at the exhibition are some paintings from the 'Batman' series. With his signature pop-art look and vibrant

colours depicting the favourite comic book protagonists of which the artist was a great fan, the works are playful and fun at first sight, but closer examination would reveal references to the dead including a series of skulls, or the eerie presence of an unidentified figure mysteriously creeping towards the unaware heroes. The notion of death was omnipresent in the mind of the artist which may have contributed to his obsessions of slipping in images referencing death and other morbid symbols. In addition, he had lived his whole life as an outsider, often in multiple sense, which made his life a perennial fighting ground. Ironically, these unpleasant life experiences have possibly lent a hand in enriching the work of this artist who was indeed not understood or appreciated duly within his lifetime.

Damian Le Bas

Damian Le Bas (b. 1963, Sheffield : d. 2017, Worthing) established a diverse practice across textile, collage, painting and performance, consistently resisting stereotype and categorisation. After completing an MA at The Royal College of Art, London, he exhibited at venues including Galerie Kai Dikhas, Berlin (2016), Kunstahalle Kallio, Helsinki (2012), the Venice Biennale (2007) and the Prague Biennale (2007), and worked closely with Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin on numerous projects including artwork for a musical 'Roma Armee'. He collaborated with Delaine Le Bas to create 'Safe European Home?', a series of installations exhibited across Europe since 2011 that explore identity, migration and borders. Challenging stereotypes and marginalisation, he initiated the Roma Biennale dedicated to art of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and other communities which came to fruition posthumously in Berlin in 2018. In 2022, his work was featured in RomaMoMA at documenta 15, Kassel, Eurasia at Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerp and in 2023 he was a subject of an exhibition 'House of Le Bas' at Whitechapel Gallery, London, on life and experience of the artist and his partner Delaine Le Bas. Currently some works are part of 'Who We Are' at Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn.

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Title: Damian Le Bas

Dates: 21 June 2023 - 15 November 2023

Private View: Thursday 21 September 2023, 6pm – 9pm

Opening Hours: Wednesday to Saturday, noon – 6pm

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