

Sean Landers
Around the World Alone
May 6 – June 25, 2011



Friedrich Petzel Gallery is delighted to announce *Around the World Alone*, the first solo exhibition of work by Sean Landers at Friedrich Petzel Gallery and the artist's 50th solo exhibition.

Sean Landers's newest body of work depicts a lifelong journey at sea of one of his signature characters and brings together elements of the artist's working practice that have defined his career. Since the 1990's Landers has produced a diverse body of paintings, sculptures, drawings and videos. An explorer at heart, Landers forged a career around risk. From stream-of-consciousness text paintings and videos to Picasso paintings, vulnerable clowns, and portraits of comedians, inherent in every body of work regardless of form or subject is the concept that Landers is baring himself, literally and metaphorically, to the world. This exhibition continues the practice.

In *Around the World Alone* Landers has once again returned to the solitary clown in the boat from his 1996 painting, *Alone*. Invoking Manet's *Rocheport's Escape*, *Alone* depicts a diminutive clown in an insufficient rowboat. At its core, Landers's clown character, then and now, is a poignant symbol of his stream of consciousness. It represents Landers's interior life and, in his words, "broke the mold of people's perception of me as the 'text painting guy,' helped me define myself as an image maker and emancipated my future as an artist." The metaphor of artist as a solo sailor, one who risks everything to achieve a life's work, is a central and recurring symbol throughout Landers's work and figures prominently in this show.

The paintings included in *Around the World Alone* depict the solo-circumnavigating sailor-clown ranging in age from young boy to old man. Punctuated by contemplative scenes, the hero can be seen progressing in age as he battles the ferocious seas and weathers storms in his seaworthy boat S.V. Monos. In *Around the World Alone (Coxswain Moon)*, the protagonist steers his boat with resolve through the night's rough waters. Once a pathos-riddled creature, the clown has grown and matured into one who has repeatedly crossed boundless oceans and successfully

mastered unpredictable waters. The clown is no longer swallowed by his hubris and folly, but has learned and is triumphing over the obstacles put forth to him along the course of life.

The various source material from which Landers drew to prepare and execute the work speaks to the ability of Landers to find inspiration in the seemingly disparate. Landers has a long-term fascination with the Golden Globe race of 1968, the first, solo, non-stop round-the-world yacht race. Of the nine men who embarked from England on this year-long race, the frontrunner decided to turn around at the last moment and continue on (Bernard Moitessier), one contestant threw himself into the ocean (Donald Crowhurst), and only one man completed the race (Robin Knox-Johnston). This race has informed his work for almost two decades, from a solo exhibition in 1995 which included drawings of Landers's imagined solo-circumnavigation routes, to a text painting narrating a solo sail gone awry, *Sea[sic]* (1995), to *Alone* (1996), to the present body of work. It is hard not to realize that Landers at any one time could be any of these contestants. Other sources of inspiration include the life and career of William Golding, the continuously transforming boat in Homer's *Odyssey*, Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Landers's own past bodies of work.

In addition to paintings, Landers will be exhibiting a new set of bronze sculptures depicting the hero clown as he moves through life and other sculptures in new mediums previously not used by the artist.

Around the World Alone coincides with Landers's exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery, *A Midnight Modern Conversation*, which opens April 21 and will be on view through June 11, 2011. His work has been exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions, including the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2010) and the Kunsthalle Zurich (2004) and many group exhibitions including *The Making of Art* at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany (2009), *This is Killing Me*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA (2009) and *Jean-Luc Blank: Opera Rock*, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France. Landers's early work is the focus of a forthcoming monograph by JRP|Ringier, to be published in spring 2011. The exhibition will open on Friday May 6th, with a reception from 6-8 p.m. and will be on view through June 18th. Friedrich Petzel Gallery is located at 535 and 537 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011. For more information, please contact the gallery at 212-680-9467 or info@petzel.com.