

# JESSICA SILVERMAN GALLERY

For immediate release

## **Luke Butler – Afterimage**

March 10 – April 16, 2016

Opening reception: March 10, 6-8pm

Jessica Silverman Gallery is pleased to present "Afterimage," a solo show of new work by Luke Butler.

"Afterimage" features two series of paintings that riff on themes of mortality, self-portraiture and what the artist calls "epic frailty." The first body of work consists of paintings in which the words "The End" or producer credits such as "L BUTLER PICTURES" run over landscapes and seascapes. Through their appropriations, the paintings have a ventriloquist aspect wherein their objective cinematic appearance masks the revelation of a highly subjective voice. In dialogue with artists such as Ed Ruscha, David Hockney and Vija Celmins, these works rehearse conclusions for which the preceding story is forever a mystery.

In the second body of work, the artist depicts himself as a tragicomic corpse in a variety of settings: naked except for knee socks and floating head down in a pool or surrounded by his art materials in a gray no man's land. Another image of "the end," the implied narratives here offer an odd combination of self-abasement and aggrandizement, presenting himself as both a mere casualty and a heroic victim. With nods at Gustav Courbet's *The Wounded Man* and Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, Butler's *Portraits of the Artist* puzzle as much as amuse.

Death has long been a theme in Butler's work. Over a decade ago, as an MFA student at the California College of the Arts, Butler created a work, consisting of his *New York Times* obituary. Headlined "Luke Butler, 34, Artist, is Gone," the text piece referred to his "stealth career" and speculated that the cause of death was "sudden contact with an institutional body of some size." In subsequent series, such as his *Star Trek* and *Starsky and Hutch* paintings (2006-present), key figures are often depicted wounded and prone, at moments where they are brought back from the brink.

Contrasting with these "terminal" paintings are life drawings of women, made with pencil and translucent crimson watercolor. Created quickly in the moment from sessions with living models, these works are "humbling, almost athletic experiences," according to Butler, which "represent a first step, where the paintings represent the last."

**Luke Butler** (b.1971) has an MFA from California College of the Arts and a BFA from the Cooper Union. His work has been featured in shows and is included in the collections of MOCA San Diego, the Norton Museum of Art (Miami), and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Arkansas). Butler lives and works in San Francisco where he teaches at the San Francisco Art Institute.